

823

D5482c

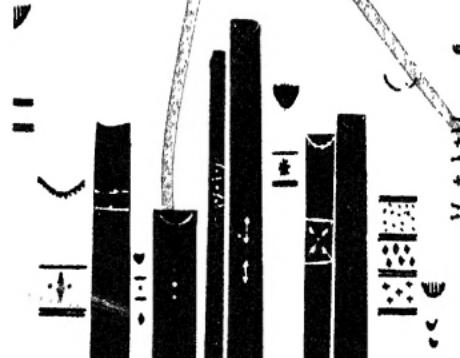
v.1

5466912

reference
collection
book



kansas city
public library
kansas city,
missouri



C R A N M E R;

BY

A MEMBER

OF

The Roxburghe Club.

“ FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE:—THE BALM AND
THE BLESSING OF LIFE.”

Atterbury.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

M D C C C X X X I X .

Printed by J. L. Cox and Sons, 75, Great Queen Street,
Lincoln's-Inn Fields.

TO

HUDSON GURNEY, ESQUIRE,

A SCHOLAR,

A GENTLEMAN,

AND A CHRISTIAN;

THESE —————

**Ret.
5466912**

TO THE READER.

LET it not be supposed that the ensuing pages are a record only of fictitious characters and fictitious events. Of the contents of this Work, two-thirds, at the least, speak the language of TRUTH; while ideal circumstances, or collateral illustrations, have helped, it is hoped, to stamp the Narrative with a more interesting and impressive character.

ROXBURGHENSIS.

Ref:

	PAGE
CHAPTER IX.	
The Village Group enlarged.—A Dinner at Squire Ponton's	129
CHAPTER X.	
Polemics of the Dining and Drawing Rooms ..	148
CHAPTER XI.	
A Midnight Battu	169
CHAPTER XII.	
The Village Church and Churchyard.—A Voice from the Pulpit	188
CHAPTER XIII.	
A Sabbath Evening at Thornbury Abbey	204
CHAPTER XIV.	
Odds and Ends.—Thickening of the Plot.—The Death-Bed of the Reprobate.	229
CHAPTER XV.	
Christmas Merriment at Dacre Hall	244
CHAPTER XVI.	
New Year's Day at Dacre Hall.—Love's Stratagem ..	265
CHAPTER XVII.	
A coming Storm.—The Lovers	286
CHAPTER XVIII.	
The Drooping Flower.—The Grave of the Good ..	305

C R A N M E R.

CHAPTER I.

DACRE HALL—THE RETURN, AFTER A FIVE YEARS'
ABSENCE.

“I CARE not two brass buttons,” said Major Dacre, leisurely dismounting from an old blood-mare, which had carried him in safety through more than one campaign, “for all the *Colosseums*, *Pæstums*, and *Parthenons* in the world—compared with a view of the chimney-throats of yonder dear old mansion, where my infant limbs were cradled; and which, after an absence of five years, it will presently be my happiness to enter.” So saying, the Major gave his mare to the groom in attendance, and bidding him lead the animal gently down the declivities, he proceeded to the anticipated gratification of a view of DACRE HALL,

from a neighbouring knoll, rising abruptly, and almost perpendicularly, within half-a-dozen bow-shots of the terrace. On reaching the highest point, he paused to gaze around.

It was sun-set, in the first week of October. The heavens were bathed in a profuse flood of carmine, amber, and opal hues; so as to dazzle the eye, on first glance, and to deprive the spectator of the power of concentrating his vision upon the object before him. But Major Dacre felt so strong and stirring a delight in the contemplation of all these heavenly glories, that he seemed to be chained down to the spot. Indeed, the heart of the coldest might have warmed on the view of a scene so illumined. The reader is, I dare say, well acquainted that there are no setting suns more profusely rich and gorgeous than those of the month of October; —when the woods wear their autumnal liveries, and display the thousand hues which stream from the tinted leaves. Although, to the best of the author's recollection, neither of those most descriptive of ancient poets, Homer and Virgil, "recreate their muses" * with any lengthened descriptions of sun-set, † it shall nevertheless be our endeavour to

* This expression alludes to a poetical work of the Earl of Stirline's, called "Recreations with the Muses."

† Morning and Night are frequently and vividly described in the Iliad and Æniad; but, as far as the author's recollection serves him, neither the sober nor the radiant characteristics

transfer this picture, as it were, of heaven, to our earthly canvas.

By the time that Major Dacre had got the whole of the prospect well and distinctly impressed upon the eye's retina, the sun had dipped half his orb into the ocean-bed ; his disk seeming to increase in intensity of colour as it diminished in size. At length, down it went—canopied with curtain-folds of intermingling purple, pink, and gold ; anon, in wavy, feathering points ; now conglomerating in carmine masses—and finally attenuating in thin, extended, streaks of fading pink, upon a ground of soft, transparent, greenish blue. A steady contemplation of such magical splendour and glory, seemed to raise the heart as well as the eye to heaven ; indeed, one would think that the earth were about to be quickly absorbed in the latter place.

Till all this lustre gradually cooled down, it was impossible for the Major to obtain a distinct and intelligible notion of the landscape and building below. The former consisted chiefly of gently-

teristics of a Sun-set. Milton and Thomson are each brief ; but Lord Byron, in the fourth canto of his “ Corsair,” has presented us with such a Grecian sun-set, as leaves competition at a hopeless distance behind. This description originally formed the opening of the “ Curse of Minerva,” as well as of the “ Corsair ;” but it was finally affixed to its present position.

sloping greensward, and undulating coppice-wood ; although, here and there, standing stiffly out against the horizon, upon one or two prominent knolls, there were oaks that might challenge the antiquary's inquiry up to the times of Chevy-chase. Indeed, a tradition had been long current that several of the dogs, unkennelled for that memorable hunt, were taken from the demesnes of Dacre Hall. A little beyond the mansion, upon a gently rising eminence, stood the village church, embedded in lime and cypress trees. This church might have been built in the middle of the fourteenth century, and therefore about fifty years before Chevy-chace.* The churchwarden's accounts of that period have unfortunately perished, or we might have perused some entries—perhaps in the Norman-French, or Latin tongue—which would have afforded rare amusement to the hungry and thirsty after antiquarian intelligence in these matters ; but the North of England has seen too many vicissitudes, from fire and sword, to cause us to wonder at such a result.

“ Peace to the spirits which sleep within and without the walls of yonder church !”—said Major Dacre, on concentrating his view, and indulging his reverie. It was precisely that time of the afternoon when the cook feeds the fire with the last

* The exact date of this wild and murderous sporting frolic was, I believe, in 1389.

shovelful of fuel, to give the *coup-de-grace* to the coming dinner—and the chimnies vomit forth a picturesque body of curling smoke, of which a considerable portion found its way to the eminence where the Major was standing;—not, however, before he had thoroughly renewed his acquaintance with the old architraves, pilasters, and coignes of the Hall of his ancestors; and, as he thought, seen a telescope pointed in the direction where he stood, which was quickly succeeded by the note of a deeply-sounding horn. As the groom reached the stable-yard, all the dogs seemed to join in the harmonious glee of barking and yelling; among whom the notes as well as the action of “Dash,” the retriever, were not a little distinguishable.

Major Dacre prepared to descend with a joyful heart and a quickened step; but could not help instinctively joining the jolly chorus below, with “*Heigh ho, the woodlands for ever!*” As the Major is pricking his way to the family residence, it may not be amiss to give the reader some insight into his character, as well as a sketch of his person. We will begin with the latter.

Major Dacre was a bachelor of threescore years, tall and sinewy in form and figure; of a very gentlemanly aspect, and the hairs of his head still holding out a vigorous siege against thinning and hoaring. It was true, the upper part of the cra-

nium—in the language of the old Gloucestershire ballad—“grew above his hair;” but he may be said to have had a fine, florid, healthful countenance, with indented eyes of darkish blue, overarched by eyebrows which gave an additional effect to their keen and penetrating glance. The Major might yet, had he chosen it, have hustled up to more than one rich heiress in the neighbourhood, in order to become “a happy man” in matrimonial bonds; but it was thought that the soft eyes and quiet demeanour of a neighbouring widow of forty-five, unblest with a family, had gradually weaned him from experimenting upon a *terra incognita*. Upon the death of his brother-in-law, Reginald Cranmer, Major Dacre, with his sister, became the guardian of young Reginald, the hero of our piece. The patrimony was rather respectable than abundant; but there concentrated in the nephew, as heir-at-law, not fewer than four landed properties, of no small amount collectively. In consequence, the eyes of all the neighbouring damsels were tutored by their respective mammas to be turned in the direction of Dacre Hall.

The Major, “from youth upwards,” had been fond of athletic sports. In former days he would boat, bat, shoot, and hunt with the best of them; but, in later life, as here represented to the reader, he used to say, that, like Lady Jane Grey, he found

RETURN TO DACRE HALL.

his best pastime furnished by his books.* Not that he was what the world calls a deep classical scholar, or a hard reader : but he had read much, and loved to reflect as he read ; and if a certain portion of intellectual food was wasted, there was still a larger portion converted into *chyle*,—for the mind, like the body, has its process of digestion. His discussions on certain classical authors and points of modern history, might at least be thought singular, if not barely defensible. He would call *Lucan*, *Silius Italicus*, *Statius*, and *Claudian* not such wishy-washy poets as schoolmasters would make their pupils believe. For himself, he was perfectly satisfied with his Olivet Cicero, and the Virgil, Horace, and Terence, from the Cambridge press—the three latter put forth in legible quartos, not quite a century and a half ago. In the formation of his little book-regiment of three thousand volumes, he admitted that he cared little or nothing for the

* Few anecdotes are more delightful, or better known, than that of Roger Ascham—perhaps the ablest philologist of the first half of the sixteenth century—calling upon Lady Jane Grey, at her father's residence at Bradgate Hall, Leicestershire, and finding her, at the age of fourteen, reading the *Phædo* of Plato, in the original Greek—in her study—while her family and their attendants were hunting the deer in the park. The anecdote is told by Ascham himself, in his “*Schoolmaster*,” with admirable simplicity and effect. The accomplished student called her *own* studies the “**ONLY TRUE PASTIME.**”

mysteries of *Bibliomania*; although no temptation should induce him to part with his copy of the work so called. It had afforded him both instruction and amusement, in spite of the fantastical cross-gartering of its dress. His range of reading might be considered somewhat whimsical. He placed the works of *Sir Thomas More*, published in 1557, as the foundation of English philology; and to these he added the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, by Burton; *Prynne's Histriomastix*; and Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World*, as his family book-pets: while, in descending to lower times, and as of a strictly miscellaneous character, he would call Mr. D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, as

— velut inter ignes
Luna minores.

His set of the French *Ana* was, as he believed, quite complete: and such was his love of Brantome's *Femmes Illustres*, that he declared he would "come down" with his hundred sovereigns to any author who should accomplish a similar work appertaining to illustrious *English* women. Ballard's work he deemed a mere tantalizing pancake: at one mouthful it was gone.

But it must be confessed that our Major was a little crotchety in his appreciation of historical characters, and especially of those of our English monarchs: as thus—he would call Richard III.

“ more sinned against, than sinning ;”* and Horace Walpole, afterwards Lord Orford, the most ingenuous and praiseworthy of successful advocates. He would also designate our Eighth Harry as a mere bluff, butchering instrument, in the hands of Providence, for the riddance of the cobwebs and rubbish of Papacy. Of local antiquities, Major Dacre cared for little beyond Dacre Hall and its neighbouring church ; and if you wished to fever his blood, it was only to talk to him of *Stonehenge* and Sir Richard Colt Hoare’s *Ancient Wiltshire*. Of *Roman Stations*, and especially of the great Roman wall near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, it was dangerous even to glance at these subjects. “ The whole of the country, from its ‘ Dan to Beersheba,’ ” he would say, “ was Romanised. Why make such a fuss about particular parts ? ” Then again, respecting the worship of Mithras—and the mundane egg—he would be positively rude upon the bare mention of the subject ; and once, it is said, bowed a neighbouring clergyman out of his study, on its very introduction.

It was upon such points only that Major Dacre was absolutely *testy*, for upon those of religion and

* There was formerly a Society, established in the City of London, for the white-washing of Richard’s character. The late Mr. Capon (a most worthy and meritorious member of it) once spoke to the author of *Cranmer*, with tears in his eyes, of “ *that much-injured monarch !* ”

politics he exhibited an almost apostolical meekness and forbearance. What was *inflammable gas* to the Rev. Gabriel Thomson, the curate, was only *carbonate of potash* to the Major.

Our Major had many peculiarities which belonged to his age and habits, tutored with the strictest attention to gentlemanly bearing in all things. He would not, like a late Welch bishop, put all his letters, unopened and of course unread, into the largest drawer of his library-table ; but, like the late Earl of St. Vincent, made it a point to answer every letter on the day on which it was received. It must be confessed that he was fond of letter-writing. Indeed, he had no pursuit to follow, in its strict sense ; and you were sure of his being in good humour the whole day, when the post brought him from three to six letters to answer. He used to say, he could answer two letters at a time—one with each hand ; but, then, he had an abhorrence of writing *cross-wise*, declaring it to be an invention of some evil spirit.

It must be confessed, however, that he had a few habits which savoured somewhat of the primness of old bachelorship ; and especially as it concerned his library—being in person and dress a pattern of cleanliness and propriety. He was a bit of a fidget if his blinds, curtains, chairs, and tables, were not exactly in the apple-pie order in which he wished

them to be : and in the management of the fire, no servant dared to brandish a poker in his presence. Woe betide him or her who presumed to displace or dust a row of folios ! “ Notice to quit” would have almost instantly ensued. Major Dacre had one or two other peculiarities worth the notice. He held *short-whist* in utter disrespect, as a curtailer of rational enjoyment, and the provocative of gambling propensities. He was also versed in a few of the mysteries of the *Pharmacopœia*, having a real regard and respect for *calomel*. “ A judicious use it,” he would say, “ has contributed to the prolongation of life ; and I believe there have been instances in which three grains of that saving medicine would have averted suicide. But I have no respect for the man who ‘ makes a point’ of taking it on a *Sunday*. He may say, delays are dangerous. ‘ Then why not take it on the *Saturday*? ’ ” “ But, my dear sir, one must take it when the shoe pinches ? ” — “ That must be a very oddly constructed shoe which pinches only on a *Sunday* ! ”

Major Dacre (for he has not yet reached the Hall) was a joyous man in society, and in early manhood had been distinguished for “ trolling a catch” with the best of them. In the company of well-bred women, the late Mr. Wyndham could not have been more gentlemanly and communicative. There was a charm in his manner which caught all atten-

tions, and won all hearts. In mixed society, and especially with his old college companions, he would occasionally let loose all the festive gaiety of a warm and a richly furnished fancy; quoting, with undeviating fidelity, from Spenser to Crabbe. He had, however, the rare talent of never obtruding, and never tiring with his quotations. They came just where they ought to come, like a rich diamond improved by the skilful setting. His conversation never flagged; and toward midnight it was that the star of his wit and ebullient spirits seemed to attain its brightest lustre. Once thoroughly excited, it was long and difficult for him (like the swell of the Atlantic after a south-wester) to compose his excited frame; and he has been known to hum or whistle a tune as he put on his nightcap, even to the getting into bed.

But we must now accompany this worthy gentleman to Dacre Hall, which he reached within twenty minutes of its first appearance; and which now, by the last full effulgence of the sinking sun, might be said to be steeped in a colour of reddish gold. All the bells of the house, in unison with those of the village church, were set in motion on his appearance. Mrs. Cranmer, his sister—her old butler, and the yet older butler of the Major—who had taken stiff root in the Dacre soil for the last half century—the housekeeper—the men-serv-

vants—were all arranged within the porch and about the vestibule, while the upper windows exhibited the white flags of the chambermaid's caps. Every eye was stretched—as every heart seemed to beat—to the full. Meanwhile, at the outer gate stood the gamekeeper, the gardener, and the two grooms, with all the dogs, who seemed to be let loose on the occasion. Our friend “Dash” was the first to recognise and salute his long-absent master. He vaulted or sprung upon him so as to *unhat* him ; but the Major, instead of checking the animal, or seeking his lost hat, kept Dash suspended awhile in the air, by pressing him still more closely to his breast. The hat, thus separated, was laid hold of by a young Newfoundland, who seemed to make it a point of duty to scamper away with it to a neighbouring spinney—while screams and shouts followed the audacious theft.

Nothing disconcerted, the gallant Major, gently dispossessing himself of the retriever, approached Mrs. Cranmer with a hurried step ; and the brother and sister were in an instant locked in each other's arms. The servants gazed, motionless, around; while Mr. Thorpe, the old butler, and his venerable partner, the housekeeper, sought relief, by a few silent tears, which fell into their upraised handkerchiefs. At that instant appeared REGINALD CRANMER. It was his first day of pheasant shooting ; and although

the charms of the sport had led him far away from Dacre Hall, yet the sound of the village bells gave “pleasing note” of his uncle’s long-expected arrival. Putting on his seven-leagued boots, he scampered through dingle and copsewood, and made his appearance on the lawn just as the Major and his mother had entered the house; when the sportsman, not stopping an instant to rub his shoes, with dogs and gun, rushed into the hall—and seizing the arms, wrists, and hands of his gallant uncle, stood motionless before him in unutterable joy.

We will leave this happy party to enjoy themselves à *pleine gorge*; the butler to uncork his ruddiest burgundy, and the steward to order all the antlers’ heads in the hall to be illumined with waxen flambeaus, flaming from silver sockets. The banquet was questionless abundant enough for a round dozen: but it was a “DAY OF DAYS:”—and there were mouths below stairs, and in the village, prepared to receive *more* than “the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” The servants’ hall rung with the very exuberance of merriment.

The amazement as well as delight of the Major, in being introduced to his nieces, was extreme. He had left them as budding beauties from fifteen to eighteen years of age, and he now beheld them in the full blossom and luxuriance of maturity. His eye wandered from one to the

other, resting upon the mother on the completion of every survey; and his natural gallantry would have prompted him to compliment the parent on the exhibition of so much female loveliness, but that Mrs. Cranmer, anticipating it, crossed her lips with her forefinger, assuming an artificial frown. The brother comprehending what it imported, acquiesced with a gracious bow.

Yet was the happiness of this meeting not unmixed with sorrow. The shadow of one little dark cloud floated, or rather rested, upon the banquet-table. Maria Cranmer, the third daughter, was absent. A vacant place seemed to be waiting her presence. She might, or she might not come. The Major was pressing a thousand questions upon his sister respecting it, but Mrs. Cranmer (with the blood mantling over her countenance) replied, in hurried and broken accents, "My dear brother, let us talk of this matter another time." Julia and Marianne, the other two sisters, only quietly observed, that as Maria had taken an early repast, she might wish to defer her appearance till the evening. Altogether, an air of mystery seemed to hang upon the responses of both mother and daughters.

After the ladies had retired to their apartments, the uncle and nephew sat up in the library, (for *there* the lamp was also ordered to be lighted,) to discourse upon plans for the future, and upon events

which had passed. This discourse was protracted somewhat beyond the limits originally intended ; but as it was of no small importance to the parties engaged, and as the events, and the projects based upon such events, of *a five years' absence*, are not to be summarily despatched, the reader may possibly wish to become acquainted with them in a separate chapter. Meanwhile, he must be prepared to endure the ensuing *prolegomena*.

The old house in which this joyous party was assembled—in other words, DACRE CASTLE, now softened down to DACRE HALL—had once belonged to the first Lord Dacre, of mad memory, in the time of Henry VIII.; that is to say, portions of it are supposed to have been as old as his time, and it was clear that the four-corner towers, and the whole of the northern side, were decidedly of that period. It was during his Chief-wardenship of the west marches that this Lord Dacre, of fighting celebrity, is supposed to have occasionally revelled and banqueted in the corridor which extends from one end of this northern side to the other; while the dungeons below, like those of Naworth Castle, might at the same time have been crowded to suffocation by moss-trooper prisoners, who had been captured in a recent foray.

Yet is the corridor, of which we have been speaking, rich in pictorial art; and especially in

the department of portrait-painting. At the western extremity of it there is a large family piece, executed in the style of that of the Pembroke family, at Wilton, by Vandyke; only this of the Dacre family (beginning with the portrait of Thomas, the ninth baron, and called by Sir W. Scott, “the hot Dacre,”)* necessarily betrays more of the dryness and stiffness of earlier times. Holbein painted the first portrait; and the pencils of More, Zuchero, Jansen, Vandyke, Walker, Lely, and Kneller, were exercised in those of the several successors to the property. It is altogether a most curious and striking, as well as original and well-authenticated, production. Some of the noble lords are seated, some are standing, some are look-

* This peppery commander served under the renowned Earl of Surrey, and served him well and truly: but he was at times a very troublesome gentleman to place confidence in. Bold, daring, courageous to excess, as fond of pikes and halberts as of roast beef and plum-pudding, he was sure to do his work *well*, if he observed his *instructions*; but his commander, in one of his letters addressed to Henry VIII., finds sad fault with his indiscretion. When they were besieging Newcastle with a considerable force, Lord Dacre took no pains to secure the cavalry or the horses within the ranks and entrenchments; so that 1,500 horses, getting loose during the night, took it into their heads to go over to the enemy, entirely through the carelessness of this same Lord Dacre. He fought, however, bravely at the Flodden Field, and was the first to recognize and secure the dead body of the unfortunate James IV.

ing to the right, others to the left ; a few are staring bolt-forward, out of the picture : but altogether it is a performance so genuine and so uncommon, that fame goes, that the author of the “Illustrious Portraits”—in ignorance of its existence, during his immortal work—wore deep mourning for a twelvemonth, on making himself personally acquainted with so rich and rare a treasure.

But in this same corridor there is *one* picture or portrait of very especial consideration. It is genuine throughout, and by the pencil of Vandyke. It is that of Lady Arabella * * *, a whole-length, draped in white satin. This portrait has more lovely, because more impassioned, features than those which usually mark the hand of the master. The hair is a glossy brown, with the elaborate ringlets, which distinguish that artist's females. The eyes are a soft transparent hazel, shaded by long jet lashes. “She breathes of youth.” She has a bouquet in her right hand, quietly resting upon her waist ; and her left hand is occupied in collecting or adjusting the folds of a white satin gown. The head, three-quarters, is gently inclined towards the left shoulder. The light fortunately streams full upon the picture, without overpowering it, or causing the colours to fade ; and it is altogether starting from, or walking out of, the canvas. Young and old, ignorant and knowing, are equally struck with

this enchanting performance—doomed to have such important effect upon the destinies of our hero.

There were—and yet may be—many peculiarities about Dacre Hall, whereof one shall furnish a specimen. The Major's father was a most redoubted antiquary; and the *genealogical passion* in particular swayed him with an irresistible force. The moment you mentioned an old name, such as Howard, Percy, Beaumont, Mortimer, Belvoir, *et id genus omne*, his spirit was “up in arms” He would run to all the peerages and heraldic writers (from Gwillim to Burke) upon his library shelves; ferret out their pedigrees upwards and downwards, and expatiate upon the exploits of their ancestors, till the sloping sunbeams warned him of the necessity of making his toilet for dinner. The Major's father was himself no indifferent hand at the use of a camel-hair pencil; and he would trace, prick, and tint coat-armour with a precision and perseverance as if his bread had depended upon his labour.

It is right to apprise the reader of some of the fruits of this commendable toil. The old gentleman once bespoke, or rather hired, the skill of some eminent artist from London. The College of Heralds had a *carte blanche* to send down the very *élite* of its members; and for two wintry months the walls of Dacre Hall enclosed the *nonpareils* of genealogists

and draftsmen. In consequence, from the wainscot of the entrance-hall, to the landing-place of the attics, there was the *Dacre Genealogical Tree*: —in full size, blossom, and luxuriance below—gradually diminishing, through the intermediate stages of corridor and bed-chambers, till it dwindled into a mere *Shrub* at the extremity of the servants' dormitories. It should be added, that over the fire-place of the entrance-hall, suspended between the antlers of the moos-deer (dug out of the Irish bogs), there was an ancient, rudely carved, ivory horn, used only on high-days and holidays; and which had been applied to the lips of Mr. Thorpe, the butler, on his discovery of Major Dacre standing on the eminence to gaze upon the residence of his ancestors. It will be found that this horn was destined to blow a very mysterious blast.

CHAPTER II.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN AN UNCLE AND HIS
NEPHEW.

THERE is perhaps something exquisitely inviting to a gentle and confidential intercourse, in the interior of a well furnished library. The curtains were drawn, the lamp emitted a subdued lustre, the fire was at once bright and temperate, when Major Dacre and Reginald Cranmer took their stations opposite each other, in green morocco arm-chairs, with a well furnished table between them. Out of doors, it was broad streaming moonlight ; not a cloud, not a breeze was stirring. The autumnal flowers, and our beloved mignonette in particular, sent forth a delicious odour. The exteriors of the library windows were smothered with the *clematis* and clusters of the later roses ; among which the *noisette* claimed its sovereignty for paramount fragrance. It seemed a night of nights. The hunter's full moon rode high in the heavens :

“ Solemn, serene, congenial—hushed in peace,
All nature in reposing grandeur lay.”

But our business is within doors. The uncle and nephew had hardly seated themselves, when the clock in the great hall struck the hour of eleven. The ladies, after a day of such excitement, were glad to betake themselves to rest.

"My dear Reginald," said the Major, gently extending his right arm, which was rapidly met, and the hand shaken by the sympathizing nephew ;— "inexpressible is my gratification on this long-sought moment. To find that you are alive and well, after the constitutional struggles of your earlier manhood, and to find your moral worth and excellent character admitted by all tongues, and established in all hearts, is a source of the most unalloyed happiness. Your dear mother's letters, from time to time, have developed everything relating to you : from them I have gathered a thousand particulars of your habits, studies, and pursuits ; and although absent in person, my spirit may be said to have been your constant attendant. Do you remember, my gallant fellow, the day on which you became of age ?—how the church bells rang, and the spigots and faucets of half the old beer-barrels, containing the barley broth which had been brewed at your birth, were in a constant state of requisition the live-long day ? Five years have elapsed since that memorable epoch. It was the will of heaven that your father should not live to witness it : but with

such a *mother*, and such *sisters*, you can never even approximate to what is called a state of orphancy. You may also remember, Reginald, that I was compelled to leave you, for a long sojourning upon the Continent, a few short weeks after that day of joyous celebration?"

"I well remember, sir, every particular to which you allude, and —"

"A moment only," resumed the Major. The nephew balanced himself in his chair—his countenance mantling with that sort of expression which indicates that feelings may be sometimes too strong for utterance:—or as if he should say, "God bless the accents which fall from your tongue!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, I left Thornborough Abbey, the abode of your ancestors, and where once that too celebrated martyr, CRANMER,* took up his residence for a short time, with feelings that may be more easily conceived than expressed. For myself, I hope never to forget that day of departure, painful as it was in many respects—when your dear mother and the girls all hung about me,

* Of this eminent man, and too celebrated martyr, by-and-by. Meanwhile, it does one's heart good to read a sentence, in which its author, John Strype, for once absolutely warms into eloquence. "Cranmer's martyrdom," says he, "is his monument, and his memory will outlast an epitaph and a shrine." I quote from memory, but not *very* inaccurately I trust.

and told me to be to them as a father through life!"

"And so you *have* been, sir"—

"Gently, young man—do not interrupt the thread of my narrative; it is important that it should be unbroken—as important to yourself as to me."

"But, dear sir —"

"I insist;"—and here the Major's brows were drawn into a tight curvature round his eyes, which now began to emit a fire furnished from within. Reginald Cranmer eluded what threatened to be a coming storm, by a gracious inclination of his head, and sinking quietly into his chair, with the smothered expression of "pardon, sir." The Major, instantly granting it, raised his back to its utmost height, and seemed to add another cubit to his stature. His nostrils distended, and it was evident that he was labouring with a sort of sibylline fury. "Reginald," resumed he with a sterner and more concentrated tone, "I have exerted myself for *your* future happiness more than for my own. I have twice risked my life to deposit that treasure for you in the castle of *Fürstenhoff* (within a few stones' throw of the borders of the Rhine), which your father, with his dying breath, urged me never to lose sight of. The parchments are entire, but the greater portion of

the gold ducats have been purloined.—You seem all amazement? Didst never hear?”

“ Never, sir.”

“ Ha! that is strange,” replied the Major; “ but no matter. Listen. In the castle of Fürstenhoff, to the left on entering, is a staircase of black marble, conducting to a richly furnished hall of porphyry and scagliola. But I am premature. I thought I heard a sound?”

“ The wind perhaps is rising, sir—for otherwise not a mouse is stirring.”

“ Well, this will be an object for future development—an object in which you are destined to play the principal part. You would like to travel?”

“ In such a case, I would travel to earth’s remotest confines.”

“ Continue to listen: your courage may cool a little from the sequel. In the hall of which I have made mention, the Baron Vesemeyer once gave a remarkably splendid ball. The guests were invited to attend in fancy dresses: masks and dominoes were also admitted. I wore my uniform as an English Hussar officer, and mixed in the festive throng. A lady, habited in a sort of nondescript dress, which, as I learnt, was worn by the Swabian shepherdesses, made up to me with a firm step and saucy air, asking me ‘if my name was not

Dacre?" On replying in the affirmative, she added, " And your *christian* name, sir ?"

" " That is *Edward*, madam, at your service."

" " Then you will rue the day," rejoined she, " when your god-fathers and god-mothers gave you that name."

" She was evidently an English woman ; and on quitting me, made up to two gentlemen who appeared to wear the Prussian uniform. My eye followed her in every direction ; and, keeping at a given distance, she walked round and round me, nearing me on the completion of every circle, as the wheeling hawk measures the distance of his prey before he pounces upon it. Meanwhile the Baron, seeing me meditative and alone, came up, and proposed to me a partner to waltz with. Although my waltzing days might be said to have well nigh expired, yet, as there was ' reason ' in waltzing, as well as in ' roasting of eggs,' I quietly consented, and requested to be conducted to my partner.

" A lady, of noble aspect and dignified figure, rose at my approach, and seemed to favour me with a half-compassionating and half-patronizing air—as I hooked my arm into a semicircle to lead her to the dance. We may be said to have started at score. I stood in need of all my ' reason ' to encounter a partner of such determined velocity of movement. She might have been nearer forty than

thirty ; but it was evident that she was *aufait* at waltzing. In a trice we had whisked entirely round the room ; nor would she allow hardly a minute of breathing time, ere she challenged me to a repetition of our convolutions. My pride and spirit here came to my aid ; and I was preparing again to start at score, but the music playing a slower movement, she repressed me, and begged me to moderate my pace. Considering this as a sort of triumph, I was too prompt to obey. We then spoke to each other in the French language, as we wheeled gently around ; and she asked me in particular if I had not been addressed by a Swabian shepherdess ? Answering in the affirmative, she added, in hurried accents, ‘ You must not go near her for the rest of the night ; nor must you, on conducting me to my seat, exchange one word with me. The swords of two officers may otherwise be sheathed in your body.’ I was rather struck with stupor than with horror at this intelligence ; and, as I continued to waltz, cast my eye every now and then instinctively on my left side, to where I had suspended my sword, on one of the pegs above the dado. She smiled, and telling me to take courage, cautioned me against leaving the castle alone.

“ So gay had been the circle, and so loud and spirit-stirring the music, that I had taken no heed of a thunder-storm, which had been raging most

furiously for the last half hour. At length, bright as was the lamp-light, you could evidently see the windows streaked with white, zig-zag lightning. A sudden fear possessed the circle: the music was ordered to be silent,—and then it was that the roar and astounding reverberation of the thunder seemed to quail the stoutest heart. At this juncture, a note was put into my hand, in which I was accused of being a plunderer and a robber,—a disgrace to my profession as an officer; and that my accuser, who had been long in pursuit of me, expected me immediately on the terrace of the castle, with a flambeau and an attendant friend. I affected to read it with indifference, and instantly communicated its contents to the Baron.

“ ‘ You must not refuse,’ said he. ‘ My castle would be disgraced by your declining to meet your challenger. I will be your second.’

“ ‘ But this is little short of assassination, sir,’ replied I. ‘ The only answer to be given is, to order the challenger to be put into *duresse*, as the fit occupant of a lunatic asylum.’

“ ‘ You will fare worse, if you don’t accept it,’ added the Baron hastily. ‘ Are you used to the sword?’

“ ‘ In battle,’ replied I. The Baron eyed me with such a look as a man puts on who meets one in whose hands his destinies had been once placed.

“ ‘ Let us away,’ said he, seizing a bright lantern with which one of the servants had supplied him.* In consequence of the downfal of the rain, the tramp of feet in advance was quickly heard ; and in a minute I found myself opposite an assailant, of stature more diminutive than my own, but with an arm and weapon which, while it convinced me of his skill, admonished me to measure cautiously every movement of my own. We each seized a lantern with the left hand, and our swords quickly crossed and clashed aloud.

“ The storm continued unabated ; but my attention was exclusively riveted to my antagonist. I was as calm and collected as if in the quiet of yon moonlight. My self-possession saved me. I kept on the defensive, while the mettle of my antagonist increased, and his lips were bathed in foam. He made a false, because a short lunge : I disdained to take advantage of it,—while the spirit of vexation and disappointment drove him to greater

* The mode of the above *duello* is not a fiction. When the author was at Manheim, in 1818, he learnt that a duel had been fought in the same manner, at midnight, in the Black Forest, by two desperadoes who were resolved not to keep their wrath cool till the morning. The chief object is, to manage the light so that the adversary may not be able to understand or parry his opponent’s thrust. This mode of duelling is, I believe, of Italian origin ; and there is a print, with an account of it, in Mr. Angelo’s work upon Fencing.

recklessness of his person. It was now evident that his fury was exhausting his strength. He seemed to retreat a little. My sword followed him at the point of his throat. The lightning rendered the lanterns of no effect:—I threw mine aside; and as my opponent's person was enveloped in one of those broad glaring flashes, which sometimes seem to light up half this nether world, I passed my sword vigorously through the fleshy part of his right arm, which rendered it impotent in an instant. He fell, and rolling, with a heavy groan, was precipitated into the ravine below."

Reginald Cranmer here involuntarily sprang forward; but his uncle, repressing him with a smile, and pointing to his person, quietly observed, " You see I did not roll after him. No, not the slightest scratch was inflicted upon my skin. God be praised, I escaped unhurt."

" And so you *deserved* to do," my dear uncle, shouted out the nephew.

" Yet hear me, my brave fellow. This was my *first*, and I shall take care it be my *last* duel. I abhor this species of warfare. The man who has been familiar to the whizzing of bullets, through all the fights from Talavera to Waterloo,—who has stormed a dozen redoubts, and charged in every possible direction, up hill and down dale,—whose breast, did he choose so to gratify his vanity,

might blaze with half a score of stars and orders—such a man, I say, may fearlessly enter his protest against the silly, stupid, and cold-blooded butchery of duelling. But to proceed. My antagonist, thank Heaven, did not die of his wound; although he merited *some* mark of remembrance of that extraordinary evening."

"But the parchment and the golden ducats, sir? might not my mother"—

"My dear Reginald, I should be sorry to reply in harsh terms, but you must wait my good pleasure for the redemption of these treasures. I believe them to be safe; and *your* hands alone must rescue them from their present imprisonment. The good time will come; and upon my counsel you may confidently rely. Now tell me," continued the Major, assuming a cheerful and *generalizing* air, "who are your new comers, and likely to be good neighbours? How think you of the new Vicar and his Curate?"

"Why, sir, admirably well; but they are men of very different habits and pursuits—each moving steadily in his own orbit, and diffusing both light and warmth as their evolutions go on. Mr. Thomson, our curate, is perhaps a little too stiff in the back for the domestic circle at Thornborough Abbey. This now and then gives him rather an awkward and perhaps forbidding gait; but his moral

worth, and his efforts to do good, are undeniable. Mrs. Thomson is a charming person, with a few little tendrils—in the shape of five children—creeping picturesquely around her. If she would only get rid of, or even modify *one* habit, I confess she would be more to my liking."

"And pray, Reginald, what may *that* be?"

"Why, sir, she is so desperately fond of making the little village-folk so very learned in what I conceive to be merely secondary and unimportant matters, and especially in that of scriptural proper names. As thus; the children on a Sunday morning, before church, are made to spell such names as these: Adonibezech, Adodijah, Aminadab, Armageddon, Ashtaroth, Arphaxad, and so through the alphabet; forgetting our more familiar and dear old friends, Abel, Abimelech, Abraham, Adam, and the like."

"But your Vicar?"

"Sir, he is a most worthy gentleman—but"—

"Ay, there is always a '*but*' when a clergyman's accomplishments or character is brought upon the carpet. I abhor your *buts*."

"Nay," resumed the nephew, a little nettled at a conclusion which he conceived the premises did not warrant; "your spirit may be at rest respecting my '*but*.' The Rev. Henry Markham—for that is the Vicar's name—is, I repeat, a most

worthy gentleman ; learned, studious, anxious to do good."

" Well, now for your '*but*,' " resumed the Major.

" But, sir, he is too quiet—too passive, and I will add, too good-natured. In fact, he is perhaps too *rich*."

" Indeed ! that is a very rare fault with his fraternity ; that at least may be endured, when accompanied with a liberal spirit. And his lady ?"

" A perfect gentlewoman—well-born, well-bred, cheerful, active, and benevolent."

" Have you no *but* for her ?"

" Marry, yes, and one that will make *you* smile rather than frown. She hath a marvellous propensity to the distribution of medicine, among the village lads and lasses, in the shape of pills."

" If there be a mitigated portion of *calomel* in these pills, they can do no harm, my boy."

" Sir, with or without calomel, these pills are showered over the whole parish within a week of the dear lady's arrival. The poor little children are placed in rows, dreading the medical catechism about to be instituted. Their tongues, and the bottoms of their eye-balls, are examined, and though they say they are quite well, and are so happy to see ' the lady ' again, yet the remorseless physician doles out one pill here, and two there—

with peremptory orders that they find their way down the children's stomachs. What is rather curious, their parents seem to take a delight in carrying these orders into effect. This punishment is usually inflicted by the Vicar's lady at the commencement and close of her summer visitation, although it must be confessed that she is liberal with *bon-bons* and plum-cake in the intermediate time."

"There is no harm in this, Reginald ; but continue your *catalogue raisonné* of new comers and neighbours. You have a new *Squire*, too, in the battalion?"

"A charming family, of the name of Ponton : but they may be said to have now taken deep root in the soil, as they have resided among us the last four years. Mrs. Ponton and my mother are inseparable ; and Julia is particularly intimate with their eldest daughter, Caroline."

"I like the name of *Caroline*," said the Major, parenthetically : "my earliest love was a Caroline, and so I hope *yours* will be." Reginald Cranmer had here to encounter a very searching look from his uncle, who, if he had used a glass of the highest magnifying power, could not have discovered the slightest possible hectic pass across his nephew's cheek : but the former, taking up the thread of the narrative, assumed a graver strain,

and formally raising his right hand, observed, that, "with him, at his time of life, the thought of a connubial union was quite out of the question. Yet he was anxious for the descent of the family property in its right channel. "You are now of a proper age, Reginald, to begin at least to *think* of this matter. I love early marriages ; the wings of young love are both stronger and more lasting than those of a middle-aged passion. Strike while the iron is *hot*, is my maxim."

"But, my dear uncle, one ought not to strike till it *is* hot?"

"About this Caroline Ponton, I am very anxious." At this instant the clock struck the hour of midnight. "Hush!" exclaimed the Major, "there is some one without, singing sweetly." They rose simultaneously from their seats, and made towards the door ; but, on the suggestion of Cranmer, the window was slightly opened ; and the following words, as if sung by the voice of a seraph, found entrance into their astonished as well as enraptured ears :

"Where'er I roam, whate'er I see,
My heart, unfettered, bounds to THEE :
Whate'er I see, where'er I roam,
My heart with THEE still finds a home.
'Midst barren rocks and desert caves,
'Midst howling winds and 'whelming waves,
For thee I live, for thee I die :
Thy partner in ETERNITY!"

"In God's name," exclaimed Major Dacre, rushing towards the outer door, and catching a glance of a female, draped in white, retreating, with a hurried step, towards one of the northern turrets—"what may this thrilling mystery mean?"

"Ah! gracious heaven, it is as I thought," answered Reginald, in a *sotto voce*, half choked with tears; "how long will this misery last?" As his uncle was now fairly cut upon the lawn, he uttered this ejaculation to himself; and ringing the bell, called for his candle, requesting that the revelries below stairs might cease, for that midnight was past. He himself was so affected, that, with a countenance blanched with terror, and with a trembling step, he sought his own apartment: and never did Reginald Cranmer pray more fervently to Heaven, by his bed-side, that it might please his Maker shortly to take the maniac to himself, than he did on that evening. Something, however, drew him to the window. The moon was at its highest point in the heavens. There was not even the semblance of a cloud, or the whispering of a breeze. Raising his eyes to that bright and blessed orb, he quietly repeated the following couplet from Charlotte Smith's beautiful sonnet to the same object:

"And oft I think, pale goddess of the night.
That in thy orb THE WRETCHED may have rest."

Below stood the Major, pacing the greensward in a solemn manner, with measured step. The old butler came to tell him that Mr. Cranmer had retired to rest; adding, “Have you *heard* nothing, sir, this evening?”

“Heard? ay, and seen too,” replied Major Dacre, with a half-tremulous tone of voice. “Explain.” But good Mr. Thorpe, the butler, was not in the precise condition for a lucid explanation, and so we will take leave of him for another day.

CHAPTER III.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

IT is now high time to make the reader acquainted with a few of the characters who have been cursorily introduced upon the stage of our drama ; as well as with a few other performers, at present total strangers to him. We will begin with Mrs. Cranmer, the mother of our hero. She had well nigh reached her fiftieth year—a woman of remarkably fine features, and well-formed figure. Her brother, the Major, allowed no woman in the county to be her compeer ; and her late husband (as he was wont to say) almost worshipped the hem of her riding-habit—for in earlier life she was considered to be the finest horsewoman in the North of England. Her hair, long, black, and glossy, admitted of every form and shape into which the hand of taste could convert it. One day, it was profusely pendant, or turned up, or twisted in masses round her fair temples, and upon the top of her head. The next day, it was braided

and platted like the huntress of the wood—the very Diana or Dido of the chase—embodying the loveliness of Venus.* So her husband would designate her. Her forehead was broad and high, and white as Parian marble. At its base were fixed two magnificent luminaries, in the shape of eyes, of a deep-grey colour, encircled with a black rim, and canopied by long, beautifully tapering black eye-lashes—such as might be taught to strike terror or tenderness into the heart of the beholder. The eye-brows were arched, and of the most perfect pencilling. In spite of the youth and beauty of her daughters, the mother (perhaps no very unusual circumstance) over-topped them both in figure and physionomical expression; and when taking an occasional gallop with her son, you might have pronounced her to have been his eldest sister. France boasts of her *Diane de Poictiers*: why not England be proud of Julia Cranmer, the Elder?

The disposition of Mrs. Cranmer was at least equal to her good breeding and sound principles.

* “ Ambrosiaæque comæ divinum vertice odorem
 Spiravere: pedes vestis defluxit ad imos—
 * * * * illa pharetram
 Fert humero, gradiensque Deas supereminet omnes.”
 Æn. lib. i. 403, 500.

The latter part of the second verse may be considered exquisite Latinity for a *riding-habit*.

It was gentle, fond, soothing, and liberal to excess ; with a fund of good humour and good spirits, such as never caused a day to be clouded, or an hour to be sad. Yet Mrs. Cranmer, in early life, had worn the dark drapery of grief ; but her devotion to the welfare of her husband and children, and that delightful elasticity of spirits and evenness of temper, which are the secret and sure balm for half of life's worries and vexations, bore her triumphantly through every difficulty. To see her when a young mother—now teaching, now touching the piano, now singing, and now dancing and romping—the little ones, galloping about her, breathless from excitement, and half choked with ecstacy—were a sight of more solid instruction and happiness than all the sing-song mechanical occupations of myriads of inmates of *infantine schools*. But this comparison is untenable, and the reader is entreated not to give it a second consideration.

Of the young circle—as Reginald was the only boy, and is destined to be the hero of our performance, perhaps the sisters may allow him to take precedence on the occasion. His qualities, good or bad, will be developed in the course of our narrative.

REGINALD CRANMER was of a fine, fair growth, measuring somewhere about five feet ten inches and a half in height. His figure was rather slim than

square ; and it must be owned that he had a sort of stoop in his shoulders. There were moments, however, when he could stand erect and straight as a dart. He might have been called a sort of chestnut-complexioned man ; with hair nearly as dark as his mother's. His hazel eye was transparent and penetrating : and there was an expression in his smile which lighted up all faces, and made all hearts bound with joy, when he told a tale, parried a saucy thrust, or wished to demolish a teasing adversary.

He may be said to have had fine talents, in which, however, a wild and thrillingly romantic imagination seemed too often to gallop away with the sober dictates of reason and judgment. But, as he used to say, when apart from society, he lived in a world of his own creation : tinged with the fairy hues of a prodigal, yet tractable fancy. Times past and present seemed to be familiar to him. Feats of arms and of love were equally delightful. To-day, he was fighting, with Charlemagne, at Roncesvalles —to-morrow threading the chambers of the Harem, furnished with an invisible lamp, where he beheld life-loathing beauty, and tenderness drooping and wasting by premature decay. And yet, a bosom so sensitive was hitherto unvisited by what the world calls a “tender passion.” There seemed to be the *niche*, but from whence was the *statue* to

stolen for its occupation ? In fine, our hero was as brave as he was virtuous ; and it will be seen that he had enough to do to put both qualities to the test.

Julia and Marianne Cranmer were as the Minna and Brenda of Sir Walter Scott's Pirate ; that is to say, the one was fair and tall—the other, brown and short. In the former you recognised a countenance of singular sweetness of expression, as well as transparency of tint. The eyes were of a vivid light blue, as is the colour of the turquoise. These were set in a fringe of dark eye-lashes ; and, oh, rare and enviable union !—her hair was raven-black. Julia Cranmer was one of those decided beauties, who light up every corner of a room on entrance ;—the old marvelled, and the young became enamoured. She had *twice* refused to wear the diadem of wedlock. Marianne was just that amiable and sensible creature, whom, to admire and love, you must not only see, but discourse with, a dozen times at the least. Her countenance was radiant with intelligence ; but she always held herself in rigid reserve at starting. When confidence and respect for her associate took possession of her, she would let fly all the skirmishing arrows of wit, anecdote, and repartee. Her smile might be called ineffable ; and she stormed the heart by that magical process, or species of *coup-de-main*,

which makes the owner as surprised as delighted by the capture. Marianne was betrothed.

There is yet a third, but a hapless, sister to notice ; one who, since the naval victory of * *, has thrown her heart into the same watery grave with her lover. The full moon yet works strange phantasies upon Maria ; and the sound of a *gun* is, for her, a “signal” of maddening “*distress*.” She is at present occupying one of the turrets of Dacre Hall, and receives the almost daily lessons of consolation and resignation from the lips of her pastor ; lips, that never open but to cheer, to comfort, and to bless. This excellent man is sometimes asked by her if he cannot make the waters (as once were those of the Red Sea) stand up of a heap—as a wall on her right hand and on her left—that she may hence explore the sea-weeds and coral-shells, to discover and bear away the corpse of her gallant Sidney ; and so to sleep upon his heart in one common grave in the village church-yard !

The CRANMER FAMILY occupy an old mansion, which for the last two hundred years has been called Thornborough Abbey. Why, and whence, it derived the appellation, is at present undiscoverable ; but it is situated on a spot called Mount Pleasant, and commands both a near and picturesque view of Dacre Hall ; between which mansions, a sort of telegraphic signal-making is con-

stantly going on. To the eye of the severely skilled antiquary, a portion of Thornborough Abbey has the decided claim of being as old as the time of Richard III.; and it seems to be quite ascertained that the famous Archbishop and Martyr, Cranmer, (of whom honourable mention has been already made *) was once on a visit here, as his family had been there located before him. On the Archbishop's last visit, he brought down with him his portrait, executed by Hans Holbein. On his execution, in 1554, crowds of visitors used to attend Thornborough Abbey, to feast their longing eyes, and feed their excited fancies, by a contemplation of this portrait of the memorable martyr; but the light in which the picture originally hung being unfavourable, it was taken down, placed upon a chair, and carefully guarded by more than one servant in waiting. A singular circumstance ensued. It is well known that the Archbishop, with the expiring energies of his voice, cried out, extending his right arm, "this hand has offended me."† On Monday morning the servants beheld this hand, thrust, as it were, into the *depicted*

* See page 23, note, *ante*.

† The words of no dying martyr contain greater energy, and even sublimity of spirit, than these; and all the errors—I will not call them sins—of Cranmer were expiated on their utterance.

flames. They were horror-struck ; and the report of it was rapidly circulated through the adjacent country. A miracle, it was said, had been performed ; and the name and memory of CRANMER seemed, in consequence, to be more indelibly rooted in the heart's core of the rising generation.

In the time of Elizabeth, Archbishop Parker made great efforts to obtain this identical portrait. Neither coaxing, nor the temptation of a high price, was wanting, to deposit it, when obtained, within the precincts of the Archbishop's own College of Corpus Christi, at Cambridge ; but the portrait was not allowed to leave its original position. A thousand discrepant stories were abroad, touching certain miraculous effects connected with it. It was said that Bonner, Bishop of London, once benighted, and taking refuge in Thornborough Abbey, slept there ; but on passing this identical portrait, the hand of the Archbishop (whom he had helped to sacrifice) obtruded from the canvas, encircled with the flame, which seemed to emit a preternatural light. Bonner was so horror-stricken, that he had no power to move, till his servants, hearing him fall, ran forward, and carried him to his bed-chamber. To *their* eyes the portrait maintained its wonted placidity. The great Burleigh once slept there, when the portrait, gifted with supernatural agency, exclaimed, as the

Premier passed by it, “Welcome, England’s boast and glory!” Its destiny, however, was severe and short-lived. In the time of the civil wars, it was carried away in pillage—as a prize too tempting for a furious republican of the old canting school ; and as it was about to be thrown into a pile, for a bonfire, a friend of Vandyke, passing by, purchased it for a mere song ; not without its exhibiting too palpable evidence of perforation from bullet-holes—the fruit of pistol practice, at a mark which could not fail to delight the gizzard-grumbling fanatics of that period. An attempt was afterwards made to restore the whole to its pristine identity, but it should seem to have failed ; for the portrait of the Archbishop, now pendant in Thornborough Abbey, if it be this *rifacimento*, is palpably apocryphal.

Having paid due attention to a first introduction to the Cranmers, we may as well make a partial detour of the village, and pay our respects to a few of the neighbours ; who are destined, more or less, to play distinguished parts in the “DRAMATIS PERSONÆ” of our “Tale of the past and the present.” Within a short half mile of the Abbey lives Mrs. Danvers, a widow (before alluded to*) occupying a sort of villa, rather than cottage, called *Woodbine Lodge*. She might have reached her forty-fifth year ; of bright complexion.

* See page 6.

intelligent features, and in manner and conversation decidedly prepossessing. As she had a sincere regard for her husband, whom she had buried several years, and as no prattler was left behind to ask “when papa would come home again?” her sorrow became calm, yet deeply fixed. It was a “godly sorrow,” and therefore not one “without hope.” Yet, if I may so speak, the more elastic machinery of her mind had become out of order, if not slightly paralized ; and had it been her misfortune to have heard a preacher every Sunday, (as was *not* Mr. Thomson) expatiating upon the worthlessness of humanity, and the presumption of indulging those hopes which are “laid up for us in Heaven,” it is most probable that the latter days of Mrs. Danvers had been tinged with a melancholy and gloom which would have caused her to hold society and amusements, of every description, first, as a bane, and, secondly, as a curse. Fortunately, neither the liturgy of the Church of England, nor the Bible with Doyly and Mant’s commentaries, furnished her with any materials of this description to work upon ; and although there was very often a simple and natural severity of look and manner about Mrs. Danvers, still the cottager’s child received encouragement to run and hide its head in her lap ; and on high days and holidays the presence of our widow graced the

village green, and her munificence rewarded diligence and worth. I may just add—what appears to be not a little singular—that, although of measured manners and generally grave deportment, Mrs. Danvers had equal pleasure in hearing and in joining popular roundelays. If I mistake not, she has, at this moment, the eldest girl of Mrs. Thomson upon her lap, to whom she is singing—

In my pleasant, native plains,
Winged with bliss each moment flew;
Nature there inspired her strains,
Happy as the songs I knew !

We must now away to *Hasleby Park*, and make our morning call at the *PONTONS*—concerning whom some slight hints have been dropt in a preceding page.* Mr. Ponton had been from boyhood more or less attached to the joys of the chase; but now, as his “way of life got into the sere and yellow leaf,” he mounted his *Nimrod* only in the months of October and November, and was usually attended by a groom, to save the trouble and avoid the risk of leaping five-barred gates. He had odd notions about horses and dogs, and eke of those who exercised them. He was proud of his stud of hunters, of which he used to say that the finest had not cost him seventy guineas; and he once with difficulty suppressed a quarrel with his

* See page 34, *ante*.

eldest son, Charles, for having given a hundred for his “Eclipse”—as he would call the animal. A fine fortune had made every department of his establishment roll upon easy wheels. There was no ostentation about the master, the mistress, or the family. The servants were numerous, but never jostled against each other ; they had even an air of what might be called good breeding about them. The eye met your wants at dinner ere the tongue pronounced them. Mrs. Ponton was the decidedly leading lady of the neighbourhood, if equipage and establishment only were considered, but she would never move from the drawing to the dining room without insisting on the precedence of Mrs. Cranmer. Their respective families were in strict alliance with each other ; but there is sometimes an intimacy too generalized, or mechanical, for the softer sensibilities to prevail ; and although everybody said that Reginald Cranmer would be sure to marry Caroline Ponton, and Charles Ponton as sure to marry Julia Cranmer, yet, at the moment of which we are speaking, the heart of each was almost as cold as marble, in regard to that reciprocity of feeling which is at once the stimulus and stay of connubial connection. Caroline Ponton never pressed herself within the foremost of beauty’s circle ; her countenance required a second and a third contemplation before its character could be

appreciated. She was a sort of Prior's "nut-brown maid;" with darkish eyes and chestnut-coloured hair; but when she spoke, or played, or sung, or smiled, or told a laughing tale, you heard the voice of a seraph, and witnessed a regularity and whiteness of teeth like unto that of a new shorn flock, when the shearer has severed the last fleece.* Her eldest brother, Charles, was indeed a sportsman to the back-bone—fearless in riding, unerring in aim, untiring in pursuit. His "view-halloo" accompanied him to his chamber, and in his dreams. Half the house has been disturbed and brought round his bed on one of these *chasses-à-nuit*. Quick, sensitive to extreme irritability; one moment as fierce as Achilles, the other as gentle as Hector. Even now, Briareus-like, with a hundred hands to fight a hundred foes—all courage and onward daring—spurning the earth beneath his feet—and his very nostrils, as well as eyes, emitting fire. In another second, these hands are collapsed, and, on his knees, his breast is bared to receive the point of his adversary's sword, or to solicit his forgiveness. We shall revert again and again to the joyous and happy circle of the PONTONS.

Two essential characters and prime movers in this village group—in the persons of Jonathan Sil-

* " Thy teeth are like a flock that are even shorn, which come up from the washing."—*Song of Solomon*, iv. 2.

vertop, Esq., attorney at law, and James Ruffham, Esq., the medical practitioner—deserve to be also noticed, however slightly, in the present place; in order that, when they start up from their “loop-holes of retreat,” they may at least have the advantage of having had their “names announced.” Nor must Richard Clutterbuck, Esq., the neighbouring magistrate, be overlooked in this brief and sketchy grouping. He will take a prominent and effective position, anon. And thus much for our Prolegomena: in other words, for putting some of our principal pieces on the chess-board, before the first movement is made in the CRANMERIAN GAME.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGER ARRIVES AT DACRE HALL.—A CABINET COUNCIL HELD.

THE sun had nearly reached his “highest noon,” when, on one bright and joyous morning, a stranger presented himself at the outer gate, which was nearly in a straight line with the vestibule of Dacre Hall. It was evident that the stranger was ignorant of the direct ingress, and he had tarried a long time there, but that our old friend, Mr. Thorpe, the butler, recognized him from the dining room, and requested one of the footmen to facilitate his entrance. The Major, having received an early visit from his nephew, had sallied out betimes upon a pheasant *battu*. It was their first appearance together, in that character, after about a week had elapsed since the return of the former. Nobody, therefore, was at home to receive the stranger.

On his reaching the vestibule, or porch of entrance, Mr. Thorpe, the butler, presented himself, and saw a man of middle age and middle stature, fair in complexion, with a small twinkling grey eye, and the lower part of his face almost smothered with

whiskers and mustachios. An old fashioned long sword trailed loosely upon the ground. Mistaking the venerable form and respectable appearance of our friend the butler for that of the master of the house, the stranger addressed him in broken English, and with measured utterance, “ whether he had the pleasure to see Major Dacre in good health ? ” Mr. Thorpe, delighted on being mistaken for his master, kept up a sort of ambiguous colloquy, from which the inquirer might or might not infer that he was the object of his search ; but on the stranger’s remarking that “ he thought *age* had made great inroads upon him since they last met,” our butler soon dispelled the illusion ; and colouring alternate purple and crimson, told him in few and stiff words that “ he had mistaken his man. His master had gone out for the whole morning pheasant shooting. There was nobody at home.” “ That is sad,” exclaimed the stranger, “ for it is absolutely necessary for me to see your master about some very important intelligence.” Thorpe approached him very closely, with a most inquisitive eye, adding, “ What is to be done ? Do you come from afar ? ” “ Only from the castle of *Fürstenhoff*.” The broad, full-mouthed pronunciation of the latter word induced the butler to conclude that the stranger had come from the invisible world below. “ How Sir ? *Fürst*—be so good to write it down.”

"Away, dotard and idiot!" rejoined the stranger, making himself swell big and lofty as the *cobra de capello* when roused from his retreat; "I shall not eat your master up!" ("Not without eating me too," exclaimed Mr. Thorpe in a side voice.) "If I cannot enter the house, bring me a chair—a bench, and I shall smoke a pipe 'till your master returns." While the eyes of the astonished butler were fixed upon the Unknown, the latter drew a richly studded pipe, divided into three portions, from his pocket,* and beginning to screw the parts together, asked Mr. Thorpe if he had a lens or a lucifer? Fearing to leave the man of mystery unoccupied, he said, that being fond of botany, he always carried a *scrutinizer* in his pocket, and urged upon the stranger the use of the stronger magnifying glass, adding, he would bring out a chair from the hall. The stranger, quietly sitting himself down, placed the glass over the tobacco-bowl, and on the contents igniting, gave it drily back to Mr. Thorpe, and proceeded to the enjoyment of his pipe.

The stable-yard clock struck hour after hour,

* In Germany they make a great fuss with their visiting pipes. The author saw one, of the value of five hundred guineas, which its owner begged might be lighted by the hand of a fair lady in the circle, to whom he was going to be married within a fortnight. The first full whiff emitted seemed, to the smoker, to be one of exquisite gratification.

and the stranger was yet in the full enjoyment of his “fragrant tube.” Mr. Thorpe, with the whole tribe of servants, came quietly forward, one by one, to the window-casements, to take a careful peep at him; who, having his back turned upon the house, was necessarily ignorant of their curiosity. At length the hour of four struck, and the venerable butler came forth, and blew a long and mellow-sounding note upon the ivory horn. The Unknown, knocking out the ashes of his pipe, started up amazed. “*Vat vas dat mean?*”—but we will give all his sayings in the proper English dress. Mr. Thorpe, with some difficulty, made him comprehend that he always used this sort of blast at four o’clock, when his master was, as then, within the neighbouring woods. The stranger took out his watch, and, asking when Major Dacre might return, added, “it was getting cold: could he sit by a fire?” This was such a call upon humanity that the butler could neither parry nor turn a doubtful answer to it, as there was wood and coal in abundance within doors. “Follow me, sir, there is a good fire in the great hall, where you may like to warm yourself.” The Unknown prepared to follow, and on reaching the interior, and finding it well garnished with pictures, observed to his guide that “his master appeared to be fond of paintings?” “Would you

be pleased to take a good look at them, sir, and especially at *this*, which is among the later acquisitions to the collection ? Be pleased to bring your chair, and stand upon it, for it is rather minute in detail, and is undoubtedly placed too high."

The stranger, first enunciating in a broad and deep tone, the emphatic *yaw, yaw!* of his country, approached the picture. The butler helped him to take his position ; and, on looking, he fell almost breathless into Mr. Thorpe's arms. " My misery, like my shadow, follows me everywhere"—were the only intelligible words which reached the butler's ears. On being replaced by the fire-side, the noise of the returning sportsmen, with the men and dogs, was distinctly heard, when Mr. Thorpe bade his visitor prepare for the immediate presence of his master. The first appearance of an English sporting gentleman, habited in dark velveteen, with thick boots or shoes, slouched hat, and checked neck handkerchief, is not very prepossessing to a foreigner ; but the stranger rose at his approach, as he saw the attentions paid to him. It was only for Major Dacre to take off his hat, and he stood erect as a gentleman with a commanding presence. " Whom have I the honour to salute ?" exclaimed he, slightly bending, and directing his steps towards the Unknown. The Unknown fell upon one knee, disengaged his sword from the leathern straps, and

presenting the handle of it to the astonished master of the house, told him “the suppliant was his prisoner.” Major Dacre was well nigh petrified with astonishment ; especially when he heard his prisoner, pointing to the picture to which Thorpe had directed his attention, exclaim, “it is all frightfully true!” The painting, in fact, represented the midnight duel in the thunder storm, of which so particular an account was given in a preceding chapter*. The stranger was his conquered assailant, who had been precipitated into the adjacent ravine. What might all this portend ? and wherefore came the stranger, from the confines of the Black Forest, to surrender himself to the mercy or discretion of his conqueror ? The sequel will show.

There is nothing, perhaps, in which the fine and gallant bearing of an English officer is more unequivocally evinced, than in the treatment of a gallant and submissive foe. The once hot blood is now cooled down into a sort of philosophical temperature. The eye beams compassion. The hand’s grasp is that of trembling friendship. The voice is calm and subdued. The nerves and muscles are relaxed, and pity prompts every tone and regulates every movement. Major Dacre requested his unknown visitor to take courage, and

* See page 29,

fear no ambushed foe. His own bosom was as unguarded as that of the individual who faced him. "You will partake of our hospitality by sitting down to dinner; and you will have a bed for the night?"—"Not exactly so," answered the stranger, in a singularly measured tone of voice and impressiveness of manner—"not exactly so (looking at his watch). I have scarcely three hours to linger here before I must return to the inn, and keep my word pledged to the Baron."—"Ha!" ejaculated our Major, "is it the Baron Vesenmeyer whom—" "Sir, it is *not* that gentleman. But I am faint. Your servant kept me four hours on the outside of your house, without deigning to—" "Thorpe, how is this?" replied the Major. "Pardon him and me too, sir," said the stranger. "I might have had a suspicious appearance; but your dinner will cheer, if it does not comfort me. I follow."

The Unknown was then consigned to the care of the Major's valet, into an adjoining dressing-room, to make his toilet; from which he came out apparently refreshed, and in cheerful spirits, still looking wildly at the pictures in the hall (on passing to the dining-room), and rather wistfully upon that in which the midnight duel was represented. In a trice, Major Dacre and his mysterious visitor were seated at the same table—alone, except with the valet and the venerable Mr. Thorpe, in attend-

ance. The latter strove incessantly to make the *amende honorable* to the stranger, by not suffering his glass to remain empty one minute; and when the Major challenged his guest to a significant glass of *Stein*, our butler filled the green-tinted receiver to the very brim. “This is my best—my *supernaculum*,” emphatically observed the Major. “It is splendid, because genuine and long preserved. No poisonous drugs are *here*.”—“What mean you?”—“By and by: my time begins to run short; and although a German, I wish my sobriety to be unimpaired.” The Major took this as a hint to expedite the repast, and Thorpe was not allowed to make superfluous speeches, or to pay superfluous attentions.

“And now, my good Sir, what brings you hitherward?”—“To secure your property, and to save your person; and although I have been your most formidable assailant, and caused your life to be perilled, I am now as happy as prompt to declare that I acted from false intelligence, and upon a diabolical principle. You were described to me as the purloiner of property destined for your nephew: of property, over which I conceived that I had the unlimited guardianship. The duel was fought with the *connivance* of the Baron Vesemeyer. You start: you look wild. Yes, worthy sir, and still more—the point of the weapon, with

which, in an accursed moment, I suffered myself to be your opponent, had been previously dipped by the same Baron into subtile poison. The wine which was presented you to drink, and to cheer you, on quitting the castle to meet me, was drugged with opiates. Had you drank a third portion of it, you had fallen stupified upon the point of my sword, and had rotted in outer darkness. Your conduct throughout that fearful encounter was even more than heroic. I deserved, as I expected—death ; and you inflicted upon me little more than the punishment of a scratch. Gallant man ! receive here the acknowledgment of my obligations. It is time to say farewell. I have performed my vow. My future life is smooth and pleasurable." So saying, the stranger rose erect, and prepared for instant departure ; but not without the strongest demonstrations of a grateful as well as hospitable feeling on the part of his late opponent, who obtained from him, ere he quitted Dacre Hall, the minutest instructions as to the recovery of the property, together with directions where letters were to be addressed on the subject. Above all, did the stranger, on placing a very curious key, half gold and half platina, into the Major's hand, urge him never to lend or to lose it. It was as the key-stone of the arch upon which all his experiments were to be brought to operate.

Major Dacre accompanied his guest to the outer door, but entirely omitted to enquire his name. He sought his library, locked up the mysterious key, composed his unsettled thoughts, and ringing the bell, desired the footman immediately to attend him to Thornborough Abbey. The shades of night were beginning to fall apace as they set out, and the hollow moaning of more than one owl was heard from the neighbouring “ivy-mantled tower.” The air “bit shrewdly;” but the *Stein* had coated the interior with that which was equal to a cloak without. As they reached the abbey—a short half-mile—the conversation of two men, in a foreign language, proved to them that there were others abroad besides themselves.

Mrs. Cranmer was not a little surprised on receiving a visit from her brother, without any note of warning, at so uncommon an hour. His countenance quickly betrayed the importance of his errand. “Where was Reginald?”—“The fatigue of the day had half worn him out, and he was preparing for bed.”—“Send for him, without a moment’s delay.” The servant shot off like lightning; and ere Mrs. Cranmer could prevail upon her brother to give even an outline of the circumstance which had brought him thus abruptly to the abbey, the nephew entered, as wide awake as when he started for the *battu*. “What, in the name of all the

gods and goddesses, my dear uncle, could have brought you here at this hour : insurrection—war—revolt—fire—thieves?"—"Nothing of the sort, my brave Reginald ; but lend your three ears, if you possess them, to what I am about to relate." They made a little circle round the fire, and on the sound of approaching feet—those of Julia and Marianne—the Major earnestly requested that they might *not* be admitted, at least during the continuance of the "CABINET COUNCIL." Mrs. Cranmer knew her brother's temper too well to attempt to argue him out of his position, and the young ladies, with a curiosity intensely excited, obeyed ; but with the express understanding that the first sound of the bell was to be a summons for their re-appearance.

In three minutes Major Dacre disclosed to his astonished sister and nephew all the particulars imparted him by the unknown visitor; adding, with an elevated tone of voice, "now, Reginald, for your seven-league boots, and all the apparatus of travelling. Ho ! for the Castle of *Fürstenhoff*!"—"I am already there"—shouted the enraptured young adventurer ; and, rising up, kept briskly walking in abrupt angles about the room. "Gently, my dear Reginald," observed his mother ; "although my *spirit* is already there with you, yet we must attend a little to the considerations of the *body*. I submit,

it is too late to think of such an undertaking at this protracted period of the year?" Here the humanity of the parent, and of one of the best of mothers, instinctively betrayed itself; but Reginald would not hear of the delay. He even approached his mother, as if to chide her for such "mistaken tenderness," as he termed it: but the Major, after pausing—going up to the fire, and turning his back upon it—now looking up, and now down—right and left—this way and that—gravely and authoritatively pronounced, that "his mother was right, and that such a journey could not be thought of till towards the end of April." The uncle added, "my gallant Reginald, you may have enough to do here, which may not make the time hang heavily upon your hands. Now, let us have your sisters in, and conclude the evening with a rubber at *Longs*." The young ladies bounded like antelopes into the apartment, and soon learnt from their brother the principal feature of the "cabinet conference."—"Cannot we all accompany you, Reginald?" was the first exclamation of Marianne; "at any rate, we shall make the most of you till you start. Did you say next May, my dear sir?" addressing herself to her uncle.—"April, May, or June—no matter for the *precise* month," replied the Major, drily. The rubber commenced. Reginald several times called the king of spades the

king of *Fürstenhoff*; and when he scored *nine*, “Did you say the castle was *ninety-nine* leagues from Coblenz, sir?” was his drollery, or his aberration of intellect. From beginning to end he was committing blunders, for which his uncle in vain called him to account. “Parchments, ducats, marble staircase, porphyry, scagliola,” &c.;* and he absolutely broke up the game by his unmanageable *étourderie*—to the infinite amusement of the family circle.

* See page 25, *ante*.

CHAPTER V.

VILLAGE GOSSIP.—THE PROGRESS OF MISREPRESENTATION.

LEAVING the inmates of Dacre Hall and Thornborough Abbey to digest their plans of foreign travel—and our hero in particular (pulling down map after map) to make himself well versed in the geography of the Black Forest—the reader is requested to take a few walks and spend a few hours with me in the village and its immediate precincts. Scarcely a day had elapsed, ere reports of the most exaggerated and conflicting description began to be circulated among the villagers. The unknown Visitor was deemed a wizard, or robber, or murderer; and it was said that the life of Mr. Thorpe was more than once threatened with the point of the stranger's long sword, held to his throat. The sudden egress of Major Dacre, on the retirement of the Unknown, helped to put all sorts of fancies into a state of combustion; and all tongues into a volubility, of which the noise re-echoed from house to house. It was also added,

that the Major himself escaped with difficulty ; for that, on nearing his sister's residence, two outlandish fellows, who had been lurking in the village all the day, told him to "stand and deliver, or they would blow out his brains!" Add to this, Mr. Reginald Cranmer had been seen for the last few hours running backwards and forwards from Thornborough Abbey to Dacre Hall, as if he was about to be posted upon an expedition of imminent peril, and of the most important consequence to the welfare of his family.

The grand mart of gossip was usually held at Mrs. Partridge's chandler's shop, in the centre of the village. The good woman herself was so fond of it, that, on a customer's coming in, she would lean her arms upon the counter immediately in front, and provoke a chat, before she asked what that customer's "pleasure might be?" Nothing came amiss to her. Politics, scandal (under all its varying and seductive forms), marriages, deaths, christenings, and courtships, were welcomed alike. Mrs. Partridge's shop was a very emporium of commerce. Candles, cheese, soap, lard, butter, treacle, sugar, brooms, brushes, ropes, twine of every description, strings of onions, sacks of flour and of potatoes, with now and then a few bunches of turnips and savoys huddled up in a corner—these were at once the sources of pride and pro-

fit to their talkative but worthy owner. In this shop the first incomprehensible hubble-bubble of report, touching the late proceedings at Dacre Hall, was vented: too general and too crazy to be distinctly chronicled.

Contiguous to this spot, and one of a similar description, was that of Mrs. Peacock—a hard-featured, loud-talking woman, who hated her neighbour in her heart, and fearlessly gave it out that more wickedness was hatched in Mrs. Partridge's shop than the united efforts of the vicar, curate, and the magistrate to boot, could counteract. “For her part, she scorned either to whisper or to bawl away her neighbour's character; vice was vice, and virtue was virtue, be it found where it might; and although she preferred the soul-searching doctrines of Mr. Quaver at the tabernacle, to the fine flourishes of Mr. Markham or Mr. Thomson, at the parish church, yet her intentions were as pure, and her character as well known, as the best of them.” Now, all this might, or might not, be true; but it escaped the recollection of Mrs. Peacock, when she indulged in this “fine flourish” herself, that it was notorious that her treacle was always watered, her flour charged with a due portion of alum and potato-powder, and that, in serving a customer with brown sugar, she always contrived to make a thick, coarse, damp piece of

brown paper the recipient of the sugar itself. And then, what sugar!—black, gritty, and glutinous—the bark of a fir-tree hardly so coarse. Her butter might be nosed at the extremity of the village. It was only in two articles that she was allowed to overtop her neighbour—those were sausages and snuff; and as all the village took snuff, Mrs. Peacock was sure not to be without her occasional circle of gossiping customers. But here, as at her neighbour's, report assumed a very humble and contradictory character. In other quarters, however, it walked abroad with a fearless front and an alarming attitude.

The first person upon whose high-wrought sensibility the supposed proceedings at Daere Hall appeared to produce an extraordinary effect, was Mrs. Thimbleton, a widow, who had once occupied the chandler's shop now tenanted by Mrs. Partridge, and who may be said to have long rested upon her oars on the smooth and lulling waters of prosperity. This good lady was making rapid strides towards what is called “the grand climacteric” of life. She had not only long received the homage of her neighbours, by the most deferential submission to her opinions and dictates, but she scorned a rival in wit, wisdom, and general knowledge. She tossed her head up higher than the lower part of the roof of her house, when Mrs. Scrimes, the parish clerk's

wife, dared to differ from her as to the extinction, or not, of the golden pippin ; and had once the temerity to declare that the Reverend Mr. Thomson had yet his lesson to learn, for having said that the publicans mentioned in holy writ were “renters of the public taxes”—“I tell you, Mrs. Scrimges,” said Mrs. Thimbleton (on the evening of the day when this supposed slip of ignorance had fallen from the worthy curate), “I tell you, that publicans were *always* publicans ; that is to say, keepers of public-houses—promoters of filthy drink, guzzlers, sots, detestable drunkards.” The good woman had sufficiently strong grounds of objection to a pot-house. Her late husband had soaked his clay some twenty years and upwards from the produce of her industry ; and, to her great praise be it spoken, she waged an interminable war with long and late sitters at pot-houses—whether these houses were “licensed” to make folks drunk, either without or within the premises.*

Mrs. Thimbleton was the admitted oracle of the village ; and she took up high ground for the maintenance of so important a character. She was

* The Act or Acts of Parliament connected with the regulation of public-houses are a disgrace to the age and the country. They legalise hordes of thieves and marauders ; and in such dens of public infamy it is that those eggs are hatched which furnish the housebreaker with his crow,

a regular staunch church-woman, twice on the sabbath. No lady in the land paraded up the lime walk to the church porch with a prayer-book more handsomely bound, or wrapt in a handkerchief of a more dazzling, a snow-white, lustre. Her delight was to meet the clergyman, on the conclusion of the service, just at the outward door ; when his recognition of her caused her countenance to mantle into a serene smile, and her limbs to sink into a graceful curvature. The minor fry, egressing at the same time, all gathered about her with looks of mingled envy and wonder, while Mrs. Thimbleton increased in stature and in step at every gaze. To say the truth, she had a pure, strong, undivided attachment to the church-service ; and knew some little about the compression of the three former morning services into the present form. At least, Mr. Scimes used to say so ; "though, for his part, he took the service as he found it—quite good enough for him, as it had been for his betters. He did not pretend to measure wits or learning with Mrs. Thimbleton, that was certain."

crow, and the murderer with his knife. But, as Cowper admirably remarks,—

Th' excise is fattened with the rich result
Of all this riot.....
Drink and be mad then ; 'tis your country bids :
Her cause demands th' assistance of your throats ;
Ye all can SWALLOW, and she asks NO MORE."

"A fine morning, neighbour Scrimes," said the former to the latter, as they met by accident, just as Mrs. Thimbleton was opening her orchard-gate to gather the last lingering clusters of her golden pippins. "Strange news abroad."—"What may it be, Mrs. Thimbleton?"—"That is more than I can pretend to explain," rejoined the lady; "but, if report speak true—"—"Ay, Mrs. Thimbleton, but when *does* report speak true?"—"Well, sir, if I am to be interrupted, I may as well wish you good day, and go and gather my pippins." The man of many Amens, taking her at her word, was passing on, quite indifferent as to what the report might be, when the disappointed widow, at the extreme pitch of her voice, screamed to him to "come back, and not insult her to her face. When had she propagated falsehoods, or given a handle to slander?" The astonished Mr. Scrimes asked pardon,—as many folks do, without knowing what offence has been committed,—and placed himself in immediate contact with Mrs. Thimbleton, who began in a sort of *sotto voce*, then raised her tone somewhat, nodded once or twice, and, pointing towards Dacre Hall, asked her hearer very significantly "if an outlandish gentleman had not lately made his appearance there?" The man of many Amens replied that he had "no knowledge of the circumstance. It might have been so."—

“*Might!*” exclaimed the oracle, with Stentorian lungs; “it *was* so. I know it. I saw the fellow as he passed my house, with a sword full three yards long trailing upon the ground. However, he got his deserts; for he came back without his sword, which was broken about his head by the hands of the Major himself. That’s a sure thing, and you may quote me for it, if you like, Master Scrimes.” The clerk said, “that it had altogether, he must confess, a very suspicious and *o-minus* appearance; but he thought no good would come of the late northern lights and meteors seen dancing about Dacre Hall.” The widow only further observed, that “perhaps it were as well, for the present, to maintain a prudent silence upon the subject, till matters were ripe for explosion: however, she desired to be *quoted*, if Mr. Scrimes were pressed for his authority.”

Mr. Scrimes, on quitting her, and going to his daily labour as a carpenter, passed the smithy, or forge, of Mr. Spark, the blacksmith. The men were busy at their Cyclopeian labour, and the *sparks* flew in all directions. Their master, as was his wont, had not quitted his feather bed; but Mr. Tibbetts, the shoemaker, and Mr. Briskett, the butcher, together with Enoch Bun, the baker, had congregated about the shop, as well to hear the news as to warm their hands. Scrimes made

his appearance just in the nick of time; when Tibbets, a shrewd man, and equally a clarionet player and getter-up of gorgeously-worked slippers, as well as a maker and mender of hobbed-nailed shoes, put the question at once to the clerk, by asking him if it were true that “a foreigner had run Mr. Thorpe, the butler, through the body with his long sword?”

“No,” answered Scrimes, glad of being consulted, but forgetful of his vow of secrecy; “it is not exactly so: Mr. Thorpe was only winged; but Major Dacre got a deadly thrust in the lower part of the stomach. The scoundrel, however, retreated with the loss of his sword, and a bit of his scull was broken into his head by the butt end of the Major’s gun.”

“So far, so good,” resumed Tibbets; “but what is to follow, and who is your authority?”

“An unquestionable one,” answered Scrimes, tartly—“Mrs. Thimbleton.”

“Oh!” they all exclaimed, “that is an undoubted authority.”

At this moment the reverend gentlemen, Messrs. Markham and Thomson, made their appearance, arm-in-arm, apparently hastening towards the Hall; when, on seeing them, Scrimes thought it his duty to retreat and betake himself to his work.

“What is all this which we hear?” exclaimed

Mr. Markham, in a gentle and inquiring tone of voice. “Has any one been murdered at the Hall or the Abbey?”

“Not exactly murdered,” replied Enoch Bun, the baker; “but a three-yard-long sword was thrust through the lower part of Major Dacre’s stomach, and the room was deluged with blood—that’s a sure thing: but the Major, ere he fell, shot the assassin through his head, and yet he contrived to escape.” As the tale was necessarily too absurd for credence, both the gentlemen with difficulty preserved their looks during the narrative.

“A good morning to you, my friends,” said Mr. Markham, and touching his hat, made towards Dacre Hall. Both gentlemen seemed to enjoy the certainty of convulsing the Major with laughter by a recital of what they had just heard.

The reader has doubtless, by this time, been abundantly convinced that common fame, or report, increases in size and frightfulness of form as much *now* as it did in the days of Dido, Queen of Carthage; when, according to Rome’s most illustrious poet,* “it was at first a wee thing; then a timid but strapping child; next, a giant in stature; and finally, it hid its head in the clouds.” The same reader can scarcely fail to have observed that trespass, assault, battery, and murder, have already

* *Aeneid*, lib. iv., v. 174, &c.

been imputed to a transaction as exempt from each imputation as the heavens were divested of thunder and lightning when Major Dacre returned and contemplated the hall of his ancestors beneath a smiling sunset.

But we must pursue the course of “misrepresentation” * a little further. The vicar and curate had scarcely taken their departure, when the thin, gaunt form, elongated strides, hollow countenance, and haggard eyes, of Mr. Jonathan Silvertop, the village lawyer, were seen in advance.

“Good neighbours,” exclaimed he, in a sort of feigned voice of humanity, “can this be *true* news which I hear? Is Major Dacre murdered?”

“Not so, sir,” observed Tibbets; “but he had a narrow escape.”

“Yes,” said Philip Briskett, the butcher, in phraseology somewhat in accordance with his trade, “they *do* say that the floor of the hall was in a swim of blood.”

“I will instantly know the truth,” replied the man of parchment and red tape, and quickened his steps towards the Hall. “Poor dear man! And all this before I had got my final instructions for the deed of gift!”

* Who, having carefully examined, can ever forget “The Progress of a Lie,” executed by the inimitable pencil of the late BUNBURY, father of the present baronet, Sir Henry Bunbury, of Barton Hall, near Bury St. Edmunds?

At this moment the master of the smithy, Mr. Spark, had taken courage to quit his bed, and to come down to learn particulars as to the mysterious affair at the Hall. He was a bluff, stoutly-built, hard-visaged man: hard as his iron, and black as his forge. He had a red night-cap on, with dirty yellow stripes, terminated by a green dangling tassel, bought of a hawker and pedlar, who made his regular circuits in the village. Putting his arms a-kimbo, Mr. Spark rather snored than spoke out to one of his men—“Tell us all about it, Jem Howlet: what’s it all about?”

“Why, master,” said Howlet, “I really cannot collect all the particulars, but our authority is Mrs. Thimbleton, who told Mr. Scrimes she might be *coated* (quoted) if necessary.”

“Pooh, pooh, I wouldn’t give the worth of a horse-shoe for *her* twaddle”—growled forth the man of the sledge hammer. “A wench has just come and told my wife that the Major’s carriage was broken to pieces in the fray, and I had been in hopes that a good job was in store for me. Nonsense, nonsense! To work, lads!” and to work they went in right earnest—a shower of stars streaming abroad at every thump of the hammer.*

* “Illi inter sese magnâ vi bracchia tollunt;” which, being interpreted, means, “With enormous strength they

The bystanders broke up the conference—somewhat daunted by the presence and language of the master of the forge. Mrs. Spark, the wife of this commander-in-chief, was a woman in many respects to be pitied, in a few respects to be censured, and in all respects to be held out as a warning to the uninitiated upon the experimental step of matrimony. She had been united to her semi-brute of a husband about fifteen years; and the almost daily “burden of his song” was a ribald verse or two, in disparagement of his wife, for not bringing him children. “Poor souls!” that wife used often to say to herself; “heaven knows what would have been their destinies had they been born!”

The habits of her husband were those of incessant and systematic drunkenness. He had a good quantity of brains, if he did not choose to muddle them with the fumes of liquor; and in his more calm and lucid moments (few and far between!) he could discourse shrewdly and satisfactorily; but, as his prejudices were both dark and deep, his dogmas were terrible. He had a sort of Shylock-hatred and loathing of the church and churchmen, expressed in tirades of the most grovelling and contemptible description. As men sometimes whistle raised their arms, and would have dashed out each other’s brains, if the human head, instead of the anvil, had received the hammer’s stroke.”

for want of thought, so our master-blacksmith would let loose his insolent ravings and shallow inuendos mechanically—like a musical snuff-box, screwed up for a given quantity of tunes—and then he would chuckle at the supposed sagacity and point of his sarcasms! To “twig the parson” was the secret joy of his heart and the constant theme of his tongue. When the vicar passed, and quietly touched his hat to him, Mr. Spark condescended to give a sort of jerk, rather than nod, of his head; but when Mr. Thomson, the curate, used to say “a fine morning, Mr. Spark!” the latter would *courteously* reply, “that’s just as it may turn out, sir.” This, however, was all concentrated within, and concerned himself alone. As affecting *society*, his moral as well as religious principles—but we are anticipating the course of events.

Mrs. Spark was clearly to be pitied for the horrible treatment which she experienced at the hands of her husband, but she was also to be censured. She was a good-natured, generous, and unsuspecting woman, but a little disposed to act the opposite part to Mrs. Thimbleton, by listening to a “pious and godly preacher” within the walls of a tabernacle—measuring scarcely twenty feet by twelve. She was also very fond of treating him with a boiled leg of mutton, and stewed Jerusalem artichokes, of a Sunday; a day, of all others when this act of

charity could be done with impunity, as her husband made it a point of getting brute-drunk every Saturday night, and lying insensible in bed till Monday morning.

The “godly man” always made his appearance in a black suit of clothes, with black worsted stockings, wearing a hat approximating to what, in cant phrase, is called a *Jeroboam*.* His manners were mild, his speech was soft, his reception was warm. One day, on the conclusion of their repast (which the “poor dear man” used to say was in exact conformity with the fare of the primitive Christians), a lad of the name of Quick, a shopman of Mr. Pettit the hatter, taking up this identical *Jeroboam*, pronounced it to have been sold by him, about three months ago, as the cast-off hat of a neighbouring Dean, to Mr. Tramp the hawker and pedlar—“a man, I should say,” added the saucy lad, “of about the same height and the same formed head as yourself,” personally addressing the expounder of primitive Christianity. The lady of the banquet bade him instantly quit her mansion on offering such an insult to her Sabbath-instructor.

Now here Mrs. Spark was to be censured; first, for preferring a tabernacle to her parish church; and secondly, for exhibiting *brusquerie* to a shrewd

* *Anglicè*, a “shovel” hat.

but harmless lad, who probably, in the course of his life, had made random shots far wider of the mark than the preceding. And lastly, Mrs. Spark held out a warning to the uninitiated in connubial mysteries, by marrying a man pronounced by all her neighbours to be a confirmed drunkard—and in the teeth of her father's advice, to shun him as a scorpion or viper. It must, however, be confessed that she kept her “betrothed” at bay, upwards of fifteen months. She would and she would not. The bridal cake, purchased a twelvemonth back, and presented to her by her mistress, was, on the bridal-day, nearly as tough and hard as her husband's hammer. Yet, it cannot be denied, that Mrs. Spark partook somewhat of the frailer portion of her sex's character. She was rather vain, and overgiven to the wearing of ornaments; which were sure to be exhibited whenever her Sunday-dinner associate felt disposed to laud her Jerusalem artichokes. One ornament in particular—formed of a “metal,” now infinitely “attractive,” and called “QUEEN'S METAL”—used to hang at the bottom of her neck, representing St. George and the Dragon; which, not being properly looked after in the cleaning way, had much of the appearance of a large grey spider. This ornament received a version from the godly man, of being the “Arch-Angel Michael discomfiting Satan.”

There remains but one more illustration of the *Progress of Misrepresentation* to notice. The by-standers, round the smithy, on returning home, encountered Mr. Ruffham, the apothecary, at a full swing trot, upon his grey horse, in the direct line to Dacre Hall. On seeing Tibbets and Bun, Mr. Ruffham pulled up, and inquired, in the name of heaven, what all this was about? It was precisely opposite to Mrs. Thimbleton's where this meeting occurred; when that good woman, not allowing any other to speak, said, "Mr. Ruffham, whatever you hear, I desire to be quoted as the authority, that's all."

"But," said Tibbets, "you told Scrimes nothing about the musket-shot, and the floor being slippery with human blood."

"Rubbish and nonsense, Mr. Tibbets! All I say and beg, is, that Mr. Ruffham will quote me as an authority for the truth only of what he hears;" upon which the respectable apothecary, turning his horse sharply round, and spurring his sides, observed, with the laconic causticity of a certain judge of the olden time, "What is truth?" Assuredly it seemed to be yet lingering at "the bottom of the well."

CHAPTER VI.

EXCITEMENT AT DACRE HALL. EFFECTS ARE ONLY
ADEQUATE TO CAUSES, AND VICE VERSA.

IT will be remembered that we left the Major at Thornborough Abbey, on the conclusion of a game of long-whist, which had been sadly marred in its progress by the absence of mind and *étourderie* of manner of his nephew, Reginald Cranmer. The Major, as was his custom, slept that night at the Abbey, and remained there the whole of the following day and night. The houses of the brother and sister were as homes to each other ; and each acted as fancy or convenience suggested.

On the second morning, or the one after that on which the preceding chapter has described, a servant was posted from Dacre Hall to the Abbey, by Mr. Thorpe, the butler, informing Major Dacre that the whole village was up in arms, on a report that he had been murdered on the preceding evening : a report, which he, the butler, seemed indirectly disposed to countenance from not having

heard from his master the whole of the preceding day. “Here is a pretty kettle of fish,” observed the Major, on reading the note; “order the carriage, sister, and let us all five show ourselves to be alive at Dacre Hall within a reasonable time.” The party were delighted at the absurdity; and Reginald, ordering his horse, said he would precede as an *avant-courier* to give due notice of the existence of his uncle. They were not long upon the road; but just as Reginald reached the outer gate of Dacre Hall, he came in contact with the groom of Sir Joseph Proudfoot, a neighbouring gentleman, of whom we shall presently have occasion to speak in a more particular manner. The groom touched his hat, and said he came from “the Priory—his master being anxious to know if any accident had befallen Major Dacre?” Instead of returning an answer with anything like the gravity of the question, Reginald burst into a loud fit of laughter, and muttering to himself “what blockheads these all are!” told the groom that his uncle was in perfect health and safety.

The groom had hardly disappeared before a loud rumble of carriage-wheels was heard in almost all directions. Squire Ponton had put four horses to his carriage to obtain the earliest possible intelligence; and Mr. Clutterbuck, a neighbouring magistrate, and a retired solicitor, had for once put

his fat horses into a jog-trot, to ascertain with all due diligence, the truth, or otherwise, of the bloody tale circulated about Daere Hall. It so happened that each and all of the parties noticed in the preceding and present chapter, were fairly assembled in the great hall, just as Mrs. Cranmer arrived in her family-carriage—with the Major sitting backwards. In this position, which his good breeding urged him to occupy, he could not be immediately distinguished; and, as there are too many weak folks in the world who jump to portentous conclusions without examining more than half the premises, so it happened in the present instance that those who *met* Mrs. Cranmer's carriage, not seeing the Major within, instantly gave it out that “his death was certain enough,”—for that he was not to be found in the family carriage. The villagers began to swarm, and to move off rapidly in groups towards Dacre Hall. The smithy was deserted, and even Mrs. Partridge for once left her shop to take care of itself.

The “hurrah!” as Major Dacre alighted from the carriage, was almost deafening. At first he could not comprehend it, and his countenance indicated a state of feeling between seriousness and amazement. What had he done to merit such acclamation? On entering the hall, they encircled him—extending their hands, as if to bristle and

hem him round with overpowering congratulations. Nature is sometimes fanciful in her operations. The joyous heart of Major Dacre became all at once as if composed of stone. There was no response to all this demonstration of generous feeling. What could it mean? “Dead and alive again!” was the general shout of the bystanders. In a little moment the vantage-peg got loose, and the Major, covering his face with his right hand, begged permission to retire to his library. Mr. Ponton instantly gave the “hark back!”—the circle was broken—the company prepared for departure; but at the extremity of the lawn the whole village appeared *en masse*, shouting for admission. Reginald soon presented himself, assuring them of the perfect safety of his uncle.

“God bless his heart, and thank God for it!” exclaimed Mrs. Partridge, who by this time was in front of the invading party.

“I knew all this was a mere frump-up of Mrs. Thimbleton!” shouted Phil. Briskett, the butcher.

“That may or may not be,” rejoined a third; “but I heard you tell Mr. Ruffham, the apothecary, that the floor was all in a swim of blood—and that Mr. Thorpe, the butler, had slipped down in consequence, and cut his forehead against the edge of the fender.” The man of slaughter, had he worn a sword, might have broken it across the

cranium of this exaggerator; who happened to be little Samuel Quick, the apprentice to the hatter before noticed. "I said nothing of Mr. Thorpe's"—"hist!" they all shouted, "here he comes."

Perhaps there is no species of the human character more important and singular than that of an old family butler, or house-steward. He lives in an element of his own. At once servant and master, he is daily called upon to enact both parts with precision and propriety. He keeps down rebellion with one foot, and with the other he is made to kneel, walk, or run, as his employer wills. Below stairs, he is an emperor; above, he is a servitor without cringing, and a dispenser rather than an executor of orders. His path of duty is short and straight—from the side-board to the back of his master's chair. His countenance is moulded into the air of a sort of negative consequence, and rarely betrays a play of features.

Mr. Thorpe, a character of this cast, having received particular instructions from his master, approached the village crowd with a slow and measured step, and with a face that seemed charged with important tidings. The villagers, herding together, hung back as he approached. Slightly touching his hat, he told them "that he hoped he was the messenger of good news from Dacre Hall. His master had deputed to him a delicate

and difficult task, but he would execute it to the best of his ability. The Major was sensibly moved at the interest they had taken in his personal safety, —and gentlemen,” (continued he, taking off his hat at the full stretch of his arm), “he wishes the ringers to have a leg of mutton and turnips, while the parish constable and such of the paupers as he may select, are to regale themselves with rashers of bacon, poached eggs, and the best beer at the Queen’s Head—on the conclusion of their day’s work. Tuffnell,” continued the solemn Mr. Thorpe, addressing the individual who was the constable in question, “to you I depute the execution of this important task. Look to it, Sir.” So saying, the venerable butler was about to turn upon his heel, and seek his master; but two or three female voices from the crowd hallooed out, “and are the poor *women* to have none of these creature-comforts?”

“They are not included in my orders,” replied Mr. Thorpe with a softened voice; “but doubtless his master had too much humanity to exclude the wives of those whom Mr. Tuffnell might select.” “*Wives!*” screamed forth the saucy voice of Sally Heiffer, “what have the *maidens* done that they should be debarred of the same comforts?” But Mr. Thorpe had retired within the mansion.

A brief notice of his venerable partner may be permitted. Mrs. Thorpe had many good qualities ; but there was *one* habit which no persuasion could induce her to lay aside. It was that of regularly putting down, in a series of one-shilling pocket-books, the *texts* which she heard delivered from the pulpit. As soon as ever the text was given out, on went her spectacles, out came her pocket-book and pencil, and down went the text. She said she could prove that the spectacles had been worn by the famous Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in later life. When she met Mr. Thomson, she would often say, “ A pretty sermon that of last Sunday !—but I think I have heard it before ? ”

“ A good thing can scarcely be too often repeated, Mrs. Thorpe.”

“ As for *that* matter, why, no ; but a little variety is charming : I *texted* you, and found you had preached it exactly a twelvemonth ago.”

I have long — perhaps too long — and sometimes with sore and heavy sighs — been convinced, that the most difficult of all earthly tasks is that of DOING GOOD. This difficulty arises, not always from the knavish, or unprincipled habits of those upon whom you wish this good to be wrought, but, perhaps yet more frequently, from their stubbornness, ingratitude, and downright refractory

dispositions. Give the poor, in a severe season, a few extra loaves, these loaves are sure to be made of the *second flour*. Manufacture soup for them—a quart each man—the peas are sure to be *rotten*, and a quart is but *stint measure!* Some unknown benevolent lady—the Mistress Markham of the village—orders a hundred of turf here, and a bushel of coals there. “Turf is not worth the burning, and Jack Green has given measure from the very worst coals on the wharf.” To return to our group of villagers.

Tuffnell was instantly beset on all sides, on the retreat of the great man of the wine cellar. He remonstrated—coaxed—threatened, shewed his ‘staff of office,’—brandished it in the air—once struck a thick-set lad of eighteen who was striving to kick his shins—and finding remonstrance fruitless, doggedly walked off, leaving the villagers to their hubble-bubble and discordant yells. There was only *one* class sufficiently distinguished in the mysterious edict of Mr. Thorpe, and that was the *Ringers*—who, scampering away, plied the five bells of the village church with all the energy and dexterity in their power. Such a peal of “treble bobs” and “bob majors” had never been before mastered. For the number of ringers, the style of execution was equal to anything known at Soham in Cambridgeshire, where there are ten

bells, but one of which (the treble I believe) has been cracked for the last half century.

On the breaking up of the party at Dacre Hall, three of them only staid temporarily behind ; these were the Vicar, Mr. Ponton, and Mr. Silvertop. Of course Mrs. Cranmer and her family were included. Major Dacre had retired to his library, and sent his sister to request the two former to have the goodness to come to him. "Mr. Silvertop would be pleased to take a chair, as he had probably a little business to transact with her brother."

"Thank you kindly, dear madam ; you are always so considerate," was the honied response of the village lawyer ; who, (having himself come to life again on the assured identity of Major Dacre) seated himself, with a suppressed smirk, in an old ebony arm-chair, and began to take out his papers and disengage them from the red tape by which they were formally surrounded.

Meanwhile the Vicar and the Squire had entered the library. They found its owner sitting at full stretched length, upon one of his favourite old green morocco chairs, and lost in reverie ; his eyes mechanically and fixedly directed towards the fire. He was not at first conscious of their entrance. On recognizing them, he started—rose—extended his hands and his arms—and seizing one of each of his visitors, squeezed them simultaneously, so

strongly, that the vicar winced a little from the pressure. “God be thanked,” exclaimed the Major; “but, gentlemen, be seated.”

“Nay sir,” replied the Rev. Mr. Markham, “your time is precious and ours is short. The issue of the late *mysterious* visit at Dacre Hall, has at least proved to its possessor that he does not live in this parish as a mere incumbrancer of the earth. A certain neighbour of ours commands *hands*—but it is at once the pride and consolation of Major Dacre to command *hearts*. Come, come, sir, this has overpowered you a little, as it well might. Meet Mr. Ponton and Mr. Clutterbuck at the Vicarage to-day, at dinner, and bring your nephew—a gallant, promising, young fellow—the boast of our village—‘the observed of all observers,’ (if a clergyman of the Church of England may escape an *auto-da-fé* by quoting our immortal bard) the winner of all hearts.”

“Not another word, my dear Mr. Markham,” said the Major, stopping him abruptly, “you touch a too sensible chord. I will come to you with pleasure. Name your hour.”

“Oot, oot man,” shouted forth Squire Ponton, “let the Vicar ding the praises of [your nephew in your ear from morning to night: he merits all that can be said of him. There is not one of my hunters, from Dutch Sam to Gim-crack, but what

would be proud of him upon their backs. Mr. Markham talks of his being the ‘winner of all hearts.’ I know not how that may be; but this I do know—that there is *one* heart which I suspect he has *won*, but which he does not think it worth his while to *wear*.” Mr. Markham here put an end to the colloquy, which was about to assume at least an *exciting* aspect, by quietly observing, that as the dimensions of his dining-table were small, he hoped the ladies at Thornborough Abbey, and Haselby Park, would do Mrs. Markham and himself the honour of joining the party in the evening; and here both the Vicar and Squire took their departure.

Mrs. Cranmer immediately made her appearance, and found her brother sensibly affected, even to abstraction, at what had taken place in the village. Could so absurd a circumstance be attended with such results?—and here the effect seemed to outdo the cause? “This is both a pleasurable and a painful moment, my dear Julia,” said the Major to his sister, quietly laying her hand within his own, —“but I know not whether this should not be considered by me as the proudest day of my life. A stronger demonstration of kind feeling could hardly have been made, had it pleased God that my death had ensued. I have not lived in vain. Where is Reginald?”

"As usual, fastening himself opposite the Van-dyke portrait of Lady Arabella * * * and wishing and screaming that he could obtain a wife so sweet and so winning as appeared to be the lady in question. There is scarcely any approaching him when he gets into this tantrum, a tantrum, by the by, which has of late violently possessed him. Julia and Marianne are rallying him to the utmost, but in vain." This intelligence appeared to throw the Major into a yet deeper fit of abstraction; till, breaking away from it, he told his sister that they had all received an invitation to the vicarage that day; himself to dine, and her and her family to follow in the evening. "In truth," added the Major, "I am not sure whether at this moment I am not to the full as wild and unmanageable as Reginald. My bosom swells, and my heart throbs with delight. Hark, how merrily the church bells are ringing! We must have a village festival by and by; what say you, Julia?"

Here Mr. Thorpe entered, announcing that, as Mr. Silvertop's time was precious, he desired to know when it would be convenient to the Major to give him an audience of a few minutes? At this precise moment, Mrs. Danvers made her appearance, in her cane chair, driven by her servant. The Major looked like a man "perplexed in the extreme."

* See page 18.

"Go and receive the widow, Julia, and I will receive the man of law: but don't let Mrs. Danvers return till I pay my personal respects to her;—show Mr. Silvertop in."

The attorney soon presented himself to his client, with quiet step, demure look, and subdued tone of voice. He began by again expressing his supreme delight that a report so dreadful had been utterly destitute of truth. Had it been otherwise, not only he himself should have lost his best friend, but the village its most generous patron. "Have you got the draft ready for my perusal?" drily remarked the Major.

"Entirely, Sir, from head to foot;—will you allow me to read it out to you?"

"No, Mr. Silvertop, not just now; that will take more time than I can spare. You may leave it, and, perhaps, to-morrow look in again, about this hour? in the meanwhile I will make myself master of its contents." The lower part of Mr. Silvertop's visage dropped at least three quarters of an inch on receiving this reply. First, because he thought the present the happiest moment imaginable for pressing a subject of the deepest importance home upon the Major's bosom; and, secondly, because he did not like the chance or the trouble of a second visit, perhaps to be dismissed

in the same summary manner ; he bowed, and disappeared.

It is just possible that the reader may imagine that the sudden appearance of Mrs. Danvers might have somewhat accelerated the dispatch of Mr. Silvertop ; it is certain that, immediately on his disappearance, the Major introduced himself in the drawing-room to the widow, and seemed, for the first time, to be struck “ all of a heap,” before her. Mrs. Danvers curtsied with a formality which she had never before assumed ; and, although she had been smiling and laughing with the family at the oddity of the report (on account of which she came expressly to Dacre Hall), yet, all at once, as the Major made his appearance, her countenance was dimmed, and her eyes suffused with more than one tear. In fact, here was “cause” and “effect” sufficiently intelligible.—A worthy man had been reported to have been assassinated, and the whole village was up in arms to ascertain and to deplore the circumstance, if true. Why should not the sympathy of Mrs. Danvers be serious as well as sincere? —and why should not Major Dacre appreciate it accordingly ?

CHAPTER VII.

A DINNER AT THE VICARAGE.

THE vicarage of * * * is situated within an almost semi-circular sweep of the small and glittering river of X. It is in a wide, rich, neighbourhood of arable land, pasture, wood, and hillock; some one or two of the latter aspiring to a scene of a mountainous character. The population may have just turned a thousand souls. The *habitans* (to borrow Canadian phraseology) are in general healthy, well-conditioned, and “strong to labour.” There is “little or no decay;” and the female portion are distinguished for their usual fecundity, in bringing forth ten—in proportion to the cattle their “ten thousands—in the streets. The farmers calculate upon a regular succession of stout hands to supply their wants; nor are they disappointed.

Mr. William Stigwood, the clergyman’s churchwarden, is one of their most regular employers and generous benefactors; and Mr. Edward Hancock, the other, or the parish churchwarden—who has

maintained that office of honour and distinction for the last thirty-one years—is both the poor man's friend, and the faithful guardian of sundry parochial charities, to a considerable amount. Amongst other charities, is one of giving away so many herrings in time of Lent, evidently of Papistical origin; and it is not a little curious that, of one individual—whose name was *Lacy*, and which is applied to that of a *lane*, having left £60 per annum for the repairs of the church, some two hundred years ago—not the slightest traces can be gathered, at Doctors' Commons or elsewhere.

The vicarial residence itself, like the living, is wisely small. The dining and drawing-rooms measure sixteen feet by fourteen, and there is a study or “workshop,” overlooking the river X. which, at some seasons of the year, is almost approaching the picturesque. The house and the gardens are well arranged, and both comfort and convenience may be pronounced as their characteristics. The vicar is in residence only four months, a good stall in a neighbouring cathedral occupying the remaining eight.

The Rev. Henry Markham and his lady make it a sort of conscientious point of spending every shilling of the revenue, deducting the curate's salary, within the precincts of the village; and

if, as represented in a preceding chapter, the habits of the vicar are quiet even to tameness, it is not because he wants a heart as whole, and a spirit as liberal and elastic, as those of any one of his richest neighbours. While Sir Joseph Proudfoot *thinks*, Mr. Markham *acts*; and where my lady Proudfoot vouchsafes to give half a hundred of turf and a peck of coals, Mrs. Markham gives a hundred of the former and a bushel of the latter. In spite of the pill-distribution propensity, mentioned in a preceding page,* Mrs. Markham commands love and respect wherever she directs her steps. It is a pity that such a couple, so fond, and so happy within themselves, should not be blessed with a few “prattlers”—as old Mother Levett, the quondam post-woman, used to designate the children in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Thomson, the curate’s lady, balances in some measure the deficiencies of this account, by possessing five young ones—

“ Who daily for their breakfast call ;”

and the parent may be reasonably said to look forward to an annual extension of the family circle. Both Vicar and Curate live on terms of uninterrupted harmony, despite of the former having voted for

* Page 33.

Sir Robert Peel, and the latter for Sir R. Harry Inglis, at a late memorable contest for the representation of the University of Oxford. It was altogether a curious, and almost edifying circumstance to find these two reverend divines, when apart, taking the most adverse sides of a political question, or of a character, and yet, when together, without either of them compromising a principle, vindicating their respective opinions and champions with a sort of jocular pertinacity.

Mr. Thomson has been heard to say more than once, or twice, or thrice, that his night-cap has never set so easy or comfortably upon his head since the granting of the *Catholic Emancipation*; while Mr. Markham never thoroughly relished a glass of port wine, with the bees'-wing floating on its surface, till that most important and salutary measure had taken effect. What might be considered a little odd, they both took the same view of the absolute necessity of *Parliamentary Reform*; the vicar affirming that his very horse, as if sensible of the necessity of that measure, seemed to canter with him more pleasantly than before; and the curate admitting that a host of vice and sensuality had been discomfited since its adoption.

“Bribery and corruption,” Mr. Markham would say, “have perhaps been but partially checked;

but what Act of Parliament can reach the human heart, when it is given to anything but ‘good works?’ You may tinker and solder it up for a time, only to become disorganised with a more sinister effect. Drunkenness and public riot have, at all events, little more now than a short-lived day to do their worst in.”

Mr. Markham and his Curate were strolling quietly and cosingly upon the terrace, or upper part of the garden, in expectation of the arrival of the dinner guests, when the Major’s carriage was seen, at a pretty smart trot, nearing the vicarage. Shortly afterwards Squire Ponton’s carriage made its appearance; and the party had scarcely been seated, when Mr. Clutterbuck, attended by his groom, cantered up at a lively pace, and, within twenty minutes, the whole party were busied at the dining table.

As this latter gentleman has not been formally introduced to the reader’s notice, it may be as well to remark that Richard Clutterbuck, Esq. was a retired practitioner of the law—once an attorney of deservedly high reputation in his profession. From rigid, or perhaps peculiar notions, he had let slip a favourable opportunity (as it struck his friends) of being united to a Mrs. Freshwater, a widow of remarkable hilarity of countenance and spirits, corresponding joyously

with something which her very name seemed to imply.

This gentleman's sense of honour was as exquisite as the proofs of his unstained integrity were at once solid and manifold ; but he had been bred up under an uncle, in a sort of semi-quakerish and semi-presbyterian school. His mouth seemed to smile at one end, and to be indicative of crossness at the other. Thus, one eye was laughing, and the other might be said to be lacrymose. He had what Burton * calls a "melancholic temperament," though naturally disposed to be cheerful and happy. He had good cause for the latter; as he had, within a few years, carried through successfully a law-suit, —involving the serious interests of a father, mother, and nine children,—in a manner, not only to bring down blessings on his head by the prayers of those whom he had made prosperous for the remainder of their days, but to awaken the attention, and secure the admiration, of every gentleman in the neighbourhood. He was yet, most wisely, the general referee of the village, and the frequent one of the county.

If you estimated his wealth and popularity by the number or quality of his plate on the side-board all the *gifts of his Clients*, you would set him down as the *facie princeps* of the gentle-

* "Anatomy of Melancholy."

men of the place. But he was not so; nor did Mr. Clutterbuck either seek or avow this distinction. He took his place readily and effectively in the circle which he frequented, and while visitors used to shout aloud upon the splendour of his cups, vases, and tripods, he would run to his library, and raising at arm's length a copy of the *first edition of Littleton's Tenures*, (given him by his friend Mr. Baron Bolland, on one of his circuit visits) exclaim — “Here, gentleman, here is my PRIME TREASURE!” For the rest, Mr. Clutterbuck was a man of about fifty-two years of age, with a robust frame, and a complexion with a touch of the parchment tint about it. He was sparing of words and of commendation, unless especially excited.

Mrs. Markham shewed all the dexterity of a proficient at the head of her table; having the Major on her right hand, and Mr. Ponton on her left. On such visiting days the Vicar sported his *rōree*—a port wine of a very peculiar relish and quality. The curate and Reginald Cranmer were opposite to each other, with a disposition to be as happy as good cheer and good company could make them. Mr. Markham and Mr. Clutterbuck were busied upon the merits or demerits of the last Act of Parliament touching bastardy. “Poor Phœbe Crane! it will go hard with her, I fear,”

observed the Vicar quietly, with a very earnest look of inquiry.

"Perhaps so," said the magistrate drily, giving a gentle nod of his head in the direction of Reginald Cranmer.

"I challenge Mr. Cranmer to a glass of his uncle's *stein*," said Mrs. Markham—observing the brow of our hero assuming rather a thoughtful air.

"Madam, with pleasure—but how came you in possession?"

"Silence, Reginald—no questions: take your broth coolly as you find it;" remarked his uncle, in a semi-authoritative tone. There was no appeal from such a decision—and Reginald drank the stein, fixing his eyes all the time upon the vicar, at the bottom of the table: then pulling a slip of paper out of his pocket, and writing upon it with a pencil, he twisted it up, and gently tossed it to Mr. Markham, who read as follow: "Not a syllable about that young woman; her brother, my mother's servant, is at this moment standing behind my chair." Mr. Markham, quietly putting the scrap into his waistcoat-pocket, challenged the writer to a repetition of a glass of stein—which, however, was declined. It was evident that a hole or a hitch had been made in this "feast of reason and flow of souls" which required some little art to rectify.

The squire, who had been occupied as much in satisfying his hunger and thirst, as in giving Mrs. Markham a sketchy account of the strange reports and proceedings in the village during the morning, just caught a glimpse of the pencil-scribbling, and asked Reginald whether he could not defer his *billet-douxs* till the dinner was over? Why so simple a question should have produced so complicated a feeling, as it appeared to do, on the part of the writer, it were difficult to pronounce—but certain it is, that Reginald Cranmer seemed to be, in modern phraseology, “hustled” by it. Here the magistrate, Mr. Clutterbuck, stepped forward to his relief; and begged he would think better of the vicar’s challenge, and allow himself to join them both. In an instant Reginald brightened up—poured an unusual quantity into his glass—and declared the wine never before tasted so fine! “I desire nothing better,” said he, “when I reach the castle of *Fürstenhoff*.”

“*Fürstenhoff*—what and where is that?” broke out the squire.

“In a few months you shall know all about it,” replied the Major; and challenging Mr. Ponton, the conversation immediately took a different turn.

It is very wonderful what effects are sometimes wrought by this vinous challenge:—at first partial, then general. I have known a dull party all at

once enlivened, and a stupid one all at once become intelligent—and a cross and crusty one all at once oozing forth in streams of jollity—in consequence of it. Words beget words—words are embodied into sentiments—sentiments awaken the passions—and the passions, once gaily roused, run away with all restrictive severities, and set the spirits merrily dancing, as it were, in the lap of Elysium? So, here, by the time the cloth was removed, every heart became warmed with good companionship. Both extremities of the lips of Mr. Clutterbuck were turned the same way—expressive of the most perfect composure of mind and body. The Major “fought all his battles o'er again:” the squire was almost uproarious about the last fox-chace—a clear straight-forward run of nineteen miles, with only three huntsmen unhorsed: the curate spoke in raptures of the vicar’s sermon on the preceding Sunday: and Mr. Clutterbuck, letting loose all the natural liberality of his disposition, as well as extent of knowledge and vigour of expression, roundly declared that the quips and quirks of his late profession were as contemptible and numerous as ever—its shiftings and shufflings as flagrant, and its expenses as intolerable and unmeaning! “A certain ex-chancellor,” said he, “made a speech of six hours upon the nefariousness of the law-practice. He said much, but did comparatively little. He

grasped the handle of the knife vigorously, but he wanted courage to exercise the blade. He contented himself with sedatives, where an operation was imperative."

"I'll cure all that for you, my dear sir," screamed forth Reginald, and clapping his hands, "as soon as I reach the castle of *Fürstenhoff!*!" A roar of laughter possessed the company, and Mrs. Markham retreated to prepare things for the reception of her evening party — but not before it was determined, at the urgent solicitation of Mr. Ponton, that all the party, with as many more as he might choose to ask, should meet at Hasleby Park that day week, to commemorate the Major's *escape.*" This, of course, was carried *nem. con.*: followed by a rider, proposed by the Major, that the same gallant guests should grace Dacre Hall that day fortnight, to commemorate his *return.* Reginald hoped that a similar festivity—but upon a more varied and extensive scale, and for both objects *united*—would warm the walls of Thornborough Abbey. At least, he would press it upon his mother as soon as she came.

It was nearer nine than eight when the Cranmer and Ponton families united their forces, and made their appearance at the vicarage. Mrs. Thomson was taken up by Mrs. Cranmer, who always made it a point to make her carriage serviceable in the

way of assisting those of her friends who would otherwise be compelled to walk on foot ; and the curate's lady was one of those natural, amiable, and unpretending characters, which win their way into hearts as well as carriages ; — one of those pleasing companions, without whom (and you scarcely know why) a party cannot be considered as complete. She was as a half tint, or reflected light, to a consummate piece of painting ; take away this half tint, or reflected light, and the prominent colours will not look so splendid.

On their arrival, the ladies found the gentlemen in the best possible state of spirits to receive them. Their intermingled voices sent forth a joyous sound. Here was chess, there backgammon, and in a third place songs—with the Major in chief command. The united effect of what the earlier part of the day had produced was very singular ; for although “ ridicule ” may in some instances be considered “ the test of truth,” yet it is not impervious to the quiet intrusion of a tear or two, which may check discourse only for its renewal in a more animated manner. If Mrs. Cranmer was silent in one corner of the room, on the same settee with Mrs. Danvers, she was conversational to excess, in another part, with Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Ponton.

“ A song, a catch, a glee !” shouted the squire.

“ By all means,” responded Major Dacre, “ tho’ it will a little disturb the whist-players.”

"Not at all," replied Mr. Ponton; "I never play so well as when a sweet voice is sounding in my ear. Caroline, do ask Miss Cranmer and her sister to help you with—

"A southerly wind, and a cloudy sky,
Proclaim it a scent-laying morning."

"My dear father, how can you inflict such a horror upon the company?"

"Anything but Italian music, that's all," replied the squire.

"Right, right," said the Major; "Miss Ponton, will you and my niece favour us with Boyce's beautiful duet of "*Together let us range the fields?*" The sweet voices of these songstresses executed it in a strain of the most captivating harmony. Mr. Clutterbuck, one of the whisters, stopped the game short by folding up his cards, and looking motionless during the whole performance; declaring, at its termination, that there was more of the genuine air of romance both in the words and music of that simple ballad than in anything of which he had knowledge.

"There I differ from you," observed the Major; "I back *Jackson* against *Boyce*. My dear Julia, do you and Marianne favour us with '*Time has not thinned my flowing hair.*'" The young ladies sang it correctly and expressively; but Boyce was declared the champion.

Reginald Cranmer had been something more than a silent spectator or indifferent hearer of what had been going on: and from whatever cause, far perhaps from courtesy, he gave his decided vote for Boyce: adding that, "the deeper notes of Miss Ponton's voice made the first more effete."

"Oh," said Mrs. Markham, "you should hear Miss Ponton in '*Love in thine eyes for ever plays.*'"

"My dear Reginald," said his mother, you surely can lend a helping hand here?"

"I'll do my best to murder it," said Reginald, laughingly; and down they sat to the performance. Perhaps nineteen out of twenty of my readers have heard this master-piece of Jackson's harmonies; and when Reginald had to unite in the beautiful burst or break of—

"But, ah! he never touched thy heart,"

it was thought that he outdid himself; although, truth to say, he had rather a mellow and strong, than a well cultivated, voice. Caroline Ponton certainly never made greater play: her notes never flowed more liquidly or penetrated more deeply; and a storm of applause from all quarters, including chess-players and backgammon-players, followed its termination? It was encored unhesitatingly; when Reginald, taking greater courage,

approached more nearly his companion in perfection of execution. Thus passed a cheerful and a happy evening at the vicarage. Life has few more rational and love-promoting enjoyments than these: love, in its strictest sense of Christian benevolence.

This chapter, lengthened as it is, must not terminate without a brief notice of the conclusion of the day's proceedings in the village. The ringers, on mastering their "treble bobs," soon made them-selves masters of the leg of mutton and turnips. Tuffnell, the parish constable, marshalled a motley group to the Queen's Head, where the married and the single,—men, women, and maidens—were crammed and jammed together in a small room, which might comfortably hold a dozen, but where three dozen, at the least, had congregated with fumes of tobacco above, and greater and lesser lakes of spilt beer below.

At five, on Major Dacre leaving the Hall for the vicarage, Mr. Thorpe commenced his reconnaissance of the village. It was his first appearance after so many conflicting and groundless reports about his master. His dress was stacher than usual; his wig was moulded into stiffer curls, and the cravat was buckled or girted more tightly than heretofore. He grasped a stout gold-headed cane in his hand, bequeathed him by his master's

grandfather, and issued from the outer gate in all the plenitude of the importance of a representative.

He was soon met and saluted by the neighbours, at first by straggling individuals, then by little groups, who all gathered around him, and at every onward step his personal importance and his attendants seemed equally to increase. In a short time he was surrounded, and almost suffocated. Now scolding, and now intreating—now smiling, and now frowning,—now raising his arm, and now his cane—he pushed and poked his way, till he got opposite the orchard gate of Mrs. Thimbleton. Here they put up three cheers for the Major, and one for Mrs. Thimbleton—who, taking the whole four cheers to *herself*, appeared curtseying at her bed-room window. At first she said nothing; but slightly pressing her left side, she “thanked them,—ay, with her whole heart,” and filling a good-sized basket with golden pippins, she showered them liberally upon the heads below.

The whole village was quickly concentrated upon this spot; the orgies at the Queen’s Head were broken up; the ringers sallied forth with their hand-bells; Mrs. Spark appeared with her George and Dragon at her neck; Mrs. Partridge’s head was for once surmounted with a decently setting cap; Tibbets had got his clarionet in the finest order; and Briskett led the way with marrow-bones

and cleavers. A little world, or London in miniature, was congregated within the street, and darkness could hardly separate the uproarious multitude. Neither heads nor shins were broken, and by ten o'clock each was “laid in his narrow bed,” —from which to spring on the morrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

HONOUR WITHOUT BLOODSHED.

THE infinite variety and exquisite machinery of the human mind is at once marvellous and inexplicable. The same set of nerves which were elastic yesterday, are almost paralyzed to-day ; and *that*, not exactly from organic derangement, or from any external accountable cause. The spirits which were in a tumultuous flow on the preceding evening, are as the “dead sea,” on the ensuing morrow. Nor earth, nor air, nor skyey influences, nor even moral nor social impulses, have any thing to do with such a result. It is part and parcel of the clay or dust of which we are made. It is the *ingrained marble*, which sometimes decomposes and sterilizes that clay. It is something above, about, below—concentrating within the inmost recesses of the heart and soul. We blame our star : we should blame ourselves. A poet, of upwards of two centuries standing, has described this sort of waywardness of

the human mind, with all the felicity, power, and originality of the muse of Lord Byron.

'Tis not the Ayre whereby we live and breath,
 'Tis not the Earth—the mother of us all :
 Nor Stars above, nor is it Hell beneath ;
 Nor these same Spritts which men their *Guardians* call ;
 Nor Chance, which seems to sway things casuall ;
 We are the sole Efficients of our evils :
 We to *our Selves* are either Gods or *Devills*.*

Reginald Cranmer was stirring betimes upon the lawn before Thornborough Abbey. He had threaded several of the paths, and seemed to be moving as a squirrel in a rotatory cage, when the servant, who stood behind his chair at the vicarage-dinner, came forward rather awkwardly, and presented him with a note folded in a triangular form ; adding, “when he had read it, he wished to speak with him, as he thought he knew what was the purport of the writing.”

Reginald looked at him very significantly, and proceeded to the perusal of the note. “Very well,” said he, quietly, on reading it, “tell Mr. Charles Ponton he shall hear from me after breakfast.”

* Hobert's Life of Edward II. 1629. 8vo. Canto II. stanza 19. The above is as a bright star peeping forth between clouds of dense darkness, in the poem whence it is taken : for any thing, of more interminable length and dullness, can scarcely be encountered than the poem in question.

"But one word, Sir," said the servant, "I request particularly to know what was said at the dinner yesterday about my sister, Phœbe Crane?"

"She is going to be married, I hope?"

"Not to my knowledge, Sir."

"Then I am sorry for it: you heard all that passed? More might have been said, but, as you were present, I requested them to desist." The servant here showed Reginald Cranmer the identical pencil-scrap which he had handed to the vicar, and which was presumed to have dropped from his pocket on passing from the dining to the drawing-room.

"Well, Sir," said Reginald somewhat drily and tartly, "this only confirms what I told you."

"Yes, Sir," replied the servant, "but what was there *amiss* about Phœbe, that you should request the conversation to drop? I am anxious about everything relating to my sister—so dear to me, in all respects, since the death of every other branch of our family. Sir, I hope no offence, but—"

"William," replied his young master, "if your sister was in *peril*, I would tell you."

"Yes, Sir, and so I hope you would if she was in *disgrace*." The man bowed, and retreated within.

Reginald was then left to his peripatetic meditations again; but he was flurried in step and un-

settled in aspect. In vain did the breezes of the morning waft the fragrance of mignonette, roses, and geraniums ; even the pungent clematis, from his favourite arbour, affected him not. He walked as a man insensible to the world without, but too sensible to the world *within*. He passed his hand across his forehead—threw up his hat—pulled it down—stroked his hair backwards and forwards—stopped—walked—sat down—rose up again—and finally retired to join the circle now assembled for the enjoyment of their breakfast.

As usual, the utmost harmony prevailed, but Reginald was unwontedly taciturn and abstracted. His sister Marianne threw in the full force of her delightful raillery, and asked him whether “love” had by this time “touched his heart?”—in allusion to the duet between him and Caroline Panton on the preceding evening. He said, with a somewhat forced smile, “everything was in *statu quo*, though he wished love had not been quite so active in *other quarters*.” His family did not comprehend what this exactly alluded to; but Marianne chose, perhaps a little too sensitively, to apply it to herself—who, as the reader has learnt, was already a “betrothed.” She coloured to the very tips of her ears, and did not know why her brother should express his regret at love being “busy in *other quarters*. Let him beware how

very soon, and very severely, it will attack *himself.*"

Just as Reginald was looking with all the eyes of amazement at his saucy sister for this very strange reply, the servant announced the arrival of Mr. Charles Ponton, Reginald bolted the remainder of his breakfast, and seemed half choked when he observed to his guest that "he was come sooner than he expected." Marianne was doomed to undergo a second penalty of a yet deeper crimson blush, as young Mr. Ponton hastened to shake her heartily with both hands, and to utter an unintelligible apology about his premature appearance. Reginald Cranmer left the room.

There are struggles in this world to endure, of which the callous and uninitiated have little or no conception ; and it is fearful and even frightful to think, what a slender partition sometimes separates friendship from hostility, and love from hatred. A long and happy life of the most gallant attachment, is sometimes saddened with the bitterest grief from one action precipitately committed, or even one expression precipitately dropped. Two dear friends, who have hunted, caroused, and fought the common enemy side by side, have deliberately "gone out" to inflict murder upon each other.

The memorable, too memorable "onslaughts" of Captain Macnamara and Colonel Montgomery,

Mr. Best and Lord Camelford, are confirmations of the truth of this position. A dog was the cause of death in one case, and a strumpet that of the other. Again ; the most illustrious Don Diego Arragnoza, was vehemently attached to, and shortly to be united with, the not less illustrious Donna Ximena de Cordova—a lady, of whose fair fame the city of Cordova rung, and whose eyes at a masquerade, like those of Juliet, “taught the torches to burn bright.” The lovers were one evening together at the Opera, sitting, unconsciously, in opposite boxes. The male lover saw a soldier, near the orchestra, raise a small note, fastened to the point of his halbert, to the female lover—whereupon the wrath of Don Diego became ungovernable. He was as a man possessed with fierce fiends, lashing him on to some act of desperation. He quitted his box, and tearing open the door of the opposite one, while Donna Ximena was in the act of directing her opera glass to the spot which he had just quitted, roared with Stentorian lungs, “Madam, your fate is sealed !”...and she became incarcerated for life. The note, conveyed at the point of the halbert, was from her old nurse, who hoped her mistress would not forget to ask her to her approaching marriage festival. If wise folk choose to become idiotic, and sane folk mad, they must expect to abide by the consequences—in the mingled showers of scorn,

contempt, and abhorrence, from their fellow-creatures. But here is digression within digression.

We are again, therefore, upon the lawn, in front of Thornborough Abbey, where Reginald Cranmer and young Ponton soon made their appearance; but stood at a little interval apart from each other. "I got your note," said the former, "but did not expect you quite so soon, and apologize for not having been ready to receive you alone."

"For that, as you please," replied the latter, "but as you know the precise character of the errand upon which I come, you will, doubtless, both as a gentleman and a friend, answer my questions explicitly."

"I shall use my own discretion, Ponton, but will not violate truth in the slightest degree."

"I desire no better. You have perhaps heard my name associated with the young woman who was mentioned at the vicarage dinner, yesterday?"

. "Never!"

"Then you have heard the name of some one else?"

"That I am not compelled to answer; nor are you, with submission, authorized to put the question."

"I differ from you decidedly; and I ask you again, as a gentleman and a friend, *who* was the individual whom you heard as connected with Phœbe Crane?"

"Again I make the same reply: you are not authorized to put the question. It is sufficient if you —"

"Reginald Cranmer, do not deceive yourself or me. You know my intimacy with your family—with Ma —"

"Charles Ponton, read a lecture to your own heart, before you consider yourself entitled to read one to mine. It is your intimacy with my family, with —"

"Hold, Sir,—hold there, I entreat you! don't drive me to an act —"

"Of folly, in its most literal sense. Why, man, I should not have allowed you to have met me as an equal—to have intruded even upon the very premises where you are now standing—if, as the betrothed of my sister, Marianne, you could have —'

"Sir, I have ceased to be catechised since I was fourteen years of age," rejoined Charles Ponton, with a sort of prolonged and sarcastic utterance.

"That may be, Sir," resumed Reginald, now raising himself erect to the full measurement of his stature: "but there may be forms of *catechism*, as there are of *baptism*, "for those of *riper years*."

"Cranmer, you know that my aim is unerring."

"Never, sir, in a worthless cause. Your hand, if it belong to the same heart which beat in your

breast yesterday, will be paraylzed ; and you will be sure to be at my mercy.”

“ And I shall be as sure *not* to supplicate for the exercise of it.”

“ You had better first ascertain *how* it would be exercised. At all events, without wishing to lower the crest of your courage, you will write a few lines to Marianne—before we take our distances. *That*, as her brother, I think I have a right to insist upon.”

“ You might have *spared* me this agony.”

“ Then you are *already* at my mercy——”

“ And how, at a *future* stage, would you exercise it ?”

“ As it always *should* be exercised—in pressing you to my bosom, and telling you that you have been a little precipitate and indiscreet !”

“ Oh, heavens !” uttered Charles Ponton, in a tone of voice as if his heart were splitting, or his soul bursting, at every word which escaped him ; “ you have indeed *hit* me hard,—harder than any *bullet* can strike. Can you *forgive* as heroically as you can *fight*?”. The young men for a little moment stood motionless—each excited by very different sensations. All the feathers, recently ruffled—and erect upon the crest of Reginald Cranmer, were quietly collapsing into their natural, undisturbed state ; and the eyes of Charles

Ponton were beginning to “pale their ineffectual fires,” as if his vision were getting dim and indistinct, when the former sprang forward, and extending his arm, exclaimed, “there is my hand, and my *heart* is within it !”

“I am unworthy of both—” ejaculated the latter, bursting into tears: and embracing it, he staggered somewhat backward to a garden seat... Reginald promptly assisting him.

At this moment, the doors of the saloon burst open, and Marianne Cranmer was seen heading her mother in directing their course towards the young heroes—who had met like Hector and Ajax, and were about to part like Glaucus and Diomed. In fact they were distinctly visible during the whole parley, but not a word was conveyed to the ears of the spectators, who, from the staggering and backward movement of Charles Ponton, concluded him to have been taken suddenly ill ; and how natural, how commendable, that Marianne Cranmer should run to his aid !

In a trice he found himself attended by one, whose presence, at that identical moment, served rather to disturb than to soothe him. What had this amiable creature done to inflict a wound, in addition to those under which Charles Ponton appeared to be writhing ? Her brother, Reginald, slightly interposed : “Charles complained of giddi-

ness. He was too festive at the vicarage yesterday. Suppose you leave us to ourselves?"

"Oh, Marianne!" exclaimed the suffering Charles, "what a brother you possess:—love him: make much of him! He is—"

"For mercy's sake," thrilled forth the inquiring voice of Marianne, "what does all this mean? What can have happened?"

"Nothing, nothing," resumed Reginald; "let us all go within, and Ponton and I will have a game at billiards." But who can repress the ardent curiosity of woman, especially when, as in the case before us, it is at once excited and directed by the most intense and devoted attachment? The very quietness of her brother's manner served only to give more impression to her determination. Mrs. Cranmer first turned to her daughter—checked her impatient sallies; half commanded, half threatened, and at last succeeded wholly by coaxing. Marianne, as gentle as a lamb, put her arm within that of Charles Ponton, and while Julia was advancing to apprise them of an unexpected arrival, they all retreated within doors.

There were two prettily fitted-up boudoirs at Thornborough Abbey; the one, with large golden stars upon a deep red ground, was the pet-retreat of Julia; the other, with silver stars of a similar size upon a light blue ground, was the favourite

abode of Marianne ; and to the latter, according to all the presumptive rights of admitted courtship, the agitated Charles Ponton, and his yet more agitated partner, seemed to be too happy to betake themselves. We shall not "*paul-pry*" into this retreat. We have no wish to witness the tears that may be shed, or the vows that may be uttered ; but we are called upon in honour and conscience to affirm, that it was doubtful whether the one or the other quitted that enviable boudoir in expressions of greater admiration of our hero, REGINALD CRANMER !

"I will knit him a purse with threads of gold, and fill it with *Victoria Sovereigns*, fresh, and scarcely cool, from the mint," exclaimed the lady.

"I will present him with a dagger and a brace of pistols fit for the girdle of a Grand Seignor," shouted forth the gentleman. At this moment Reginald came scampering up the stairs to announce the arrival of his sister Maria.

I am willing both to hope and to believe that the reader has not entirely lost sight of this interesting and pitiable creature, whom we left singing wildly, by moonlight, to her astonished uncle, on the green-sward of Dacre Hall.* She had much rallied since that night. The moon had gone a good deal into her wane ; and as the morning was calm and soft,

* See page 35, *ante*.

the Major had prevailed upon her to take a drive to Thornborough Abbey. It was necessary to use great judgment in the treatment of her. Extremes of every kind were to be avoided ; and it should appear as if she had only returned from an airing, having before breakfasted at the Abbey.

Of all parts to act, in this world of complicated wretchedness, that of the mother, Mrs. Cranmer, was among the most delicate and difficult. With a heart, as brimful of maternal affection as it was always bounding with social delight, she approached her daughter ; and although her manner was guardedly subdued, her eyes were suffused with tears ; her cheeks were flushed with mingled joy and pain ; and her tone of voice at once tremulous and kind. In a moment Maria flew to Mrs. Cranmer, and buried her head in her bosom : merely nodded to her sisters, and asked Reginald if he had a good day's pheasant-shooting ? All this in a breath, and in a manner hurried and *coupé*—as the French call it.

The readiest answers were made to every inquiry she might prefer, and in a manner soft, easy, and natural ; for her eyes, so large, so lovely, and of a colour like that of the violet, would now and then be wandering strangely about the apartment. The first sight of Charles Ponton startled her. “ You are happy ; you have found

your lover in the coral rocks ; and to-morrow shall be your bridal day. Is it not so ?"—spake the agitated Maria, extending her hand to young Ponton.

" Not quite so soon as to-morrow ; but I hope we shall have a warmer berth than that of coral rocks, when the day in question *does* take place," —replied, laughingly, the happy Charles. But he had committed a great indiscretion, by maintaining what was in fact a *link* in the chain of that *delusion* which was the prime cause of her mental aberration. Maria Cranmer was preparing for a great burst—for exclamations which would have caused their hearts as well as the chamber to ring—but her mother quietly broke up the circle, by saying she had some beautiful patchwork to show her, in an adjoining room : whither they all betook themselves, leaving Reginald and Charles behind.

What feelings and what expressions *now* possessed, and fell from, these " gallant chieftains !" for, by this time, their emotions, arising from a recent occurrence, had almost entirely subsided. " Gracious heaven !" said the latter, " how could I—"

" No more of this, if thou lov'st me, Charles Ponton," replied Reginald.—" Let us not rip open wounds that are not only closed, but of which

neither scar nor traces can ever be left behind. Our skins are as smooth and entire as if they had been rubbed down by the wings of a dove ; and if you won't let me regard you for your *own* sake, at least allow me to do so for that of dear Marianne !”

“ For mercy's sake, not another *bullet* !”—exclaimed Charles ; “ be content with the first execution.” These excellent young men could now scarcely refrain from the most extravagant emotions and demonstrations of the warmest friendship ; agreeing rigidly and strictly between themselves never to let a word of what had passed between them escape—Charles Ponton forgetting that his Beloved was also in the secret. In a few minutes Maria and the ladies returned, the former remarking to young Ponton that she had seen the patchwork to which her mother had directed her attention, and that it would make a princely coverlid for a marriage-bed. “ She would toss up who should possess it, herself or Mr. Charles Ponton ?” They humoured her, and Maria won ; insisting upon carrying it home to Dacre Hall, for that her wedding was to take place on the morrow. This was an unfortunate result ; but there was a comparatively delightful calm and quiet about Maria Cranmer which seemed tacitly to assure her mother that the time was not remote when the delusion would wholly subside—and when reason, judge-

ment, and affection, would return to flow in their natural channels.

Maria spent the whole day with them ; but it was essential that Charles Ponton should take his departure, for more than once or twice she had accosted him as her “*Sidney!*”—and on a slight notice of the village revelries, or rather of the bell-ringing, on the preceding day, she said, that she “liked every thing but the ‘*firing*’ of the bells. They reminded her of the roar of *cannon.*”

CHAPTER IX.

THE VILLAGE GROUP ENLARGED.—A DINNER AT SQUIRE PONTON'S.

MULTIFARIOUS as the characters may appear to be in the fifth chapter of our work, it is yet necessary, for the successful completion of our labours—or rather, for the more perfect finishing of our *VILLAGE PICTURE*—to introduce a few additional characters ; not for the sake of crowding the canvas—but that truth, by taking a wider range, may elicit a more general interest. Who have we in yonder corner, with a fur cap upon his head, a spud across his shoulders, and a number of wooden traps in his left hand, accompanied by a dog that seems to be of all colours, and as weather-beaten as himself ? It is Roger Payne, the mole-catcher and village poet ; a man, the very echo of whose footsteps is heard and dreaded by the subterraneous blind race, whom he mercilessly destroys, sometimes to the amount of fifty per day. The fame of his craft or calling is spread far and wide throughout the country ; and the farmer doffs his hat to him with

unusual formality, as he strides across the furrows to put his fatal machinery into play.

Our friend Roger is a character in more callings than one. He is a vocalist as well as a poet, and chants his own strains in a style which Mr. Thomas Moore must ever despair of attaining. The chimney-corner of every cottage is always at his service, and the old oaken chair at the Queen's Head—clearly of the time of Elizabeth—seems to be his own, by a sort of prescriptive right, on great occasions of public rejoicing. It was sitting in this identical chair, at the recent coronation of our VIRGIN QUEEN, that the mole-catcher chaunted the stanzas which ensue—every part and particle of which being of his own fabrication :—

“ You gentlemen of England,
O be you not cast down ;
I find there is a *Raven*
That *want* to wear the crown.

I see it placed upon his head,
'Tis curious to the eye ;
To see a crown upon the head
Of any bird that *fly*.

This proves that Satan goes about
He *wander* up and down ;
I find he have a servant,
That *want* to wear the crown.

You know, VICTORIA she is crown'd,
And she shall have the sway ;
And if we catch the raven,
We'll turn him t'other way.

O, may she live for many a year !
And may such power be given,
That she may live to wear that crown,
That *shine* so bright in HEAVEN."

Who or what is meant by the "*Raven*," must be left for future commentators to determine ; for the poet has been pressed hard upon the subject, but his answer is studiously evasive. The countenance of our village-poet is shrewd to excess ; shrewd somewhat by years, but picturesque from the wasting of flesh. His dark grey ferretty eyes, with overhanging wiry brows of intermingling black and white, give a cunning and treacherous character to their expression. His nose is long, and flattened at the extremity ; his mouth is wide and his lips are thin. He is deformed by a hump of no diminutive size upon his back ; but though short in stature, his legs are thin and long, and his thighs seem to be huddled up into his stomach.

The boys tease him sadly at times—asking him to "give them a ride on his hump ;" but woe betide the urchin who gets within his clutches !—for Master Payne has no mercy with his mole-spud. He is a severe husband—his wife often exclaiming, with a sigh, that " all his love had now flown quite away !" It had once, however, been brightly burning ; for the eldest daughter of this union, Liddy by Christian name, and now in service, is admitted

to be among the fairest damsels in the neighbourhood. Of the younger daughter, Prudence, the parent is pleased to observe that “Satan has been lately blowing his trumpet in her ears.” Indeed, the parent has no very exalted notion of that sex whom “man was born to please.” He tells his wife, like a true Musselman, that no woman can be saved ; and heaps upon her unoffending head all the wretched traits of female character with which the Bible supplies him ; his wife at the same time wondering at the depth of his biblical erudition ! She says, “Roger can beat most parsons, if he were put to it.” Our mole-catcher and poet never writes in a cursive hand, but in imitation of print, and always with a steel pen. His effusions are usually encircled by a border, which would be arabesque—if it could.

Shenstone has obtained his largest share of reputation from his ‘Village Schoolmistress.’ I desire only a tithe part of that reputation from the unavoidably brief account which I am compelled to give of Mrs. Tucker, the renowned schoolmistress, of twenty-one years’ standing, of the village under consideration. Her fame is of two species ; the one, as respects her individual self—the other, as it appertains to her mode of teaching. Her own vocabulary is in all respects unique. Her words are not only among the quaintest and strangest of

the county, but they come whiffling, in a sort of slip-shod way, out of the corners of her mouth ; her right hand being usually raised so as to cover half her mouth and cheek as she utters them. Her inferences are scarcely saucy enough for inuendos ; but in expatiating upon village events, whether robberies or revelries, she veils them in a form of mystery peculiarly her own.

She is good-natured and kind-hearted in the main ; and loves “a bit of news,” even if it were in a newspaper of a month old, to the very bottom of her heart. No luxury to her can be so supreme as, on the dismissal of her scholars, to sit down and read the *St. James's Chronicle*, or *Bell's Weekly Messenger*—the former being regularly supplied by the curate, and the latter by the senior churchwarden. To see her fix on her spectacles, square the paper, and get the precise *morceau* of news which she wishes to devour, is in all respects delectable. Of politics, severely so considered, she has no notion ; and, although everybody knows who is King or Queen, few are exactly informed who is the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Tucker had once a tough fight with the molecatcher, in support of Mr. Pitt being *still* at the head of the administration, and Mr. Fox at that of the opposition. “Well, well,” said she, on being vanquished ; “it’s of no consequence. There must

be a Pitt and a Fox in every House of Commons. Honesty is the best policy ; and if one set be honest one week, and another another, you get to the end of the year just the same."

Mrs. Tucker's mode of instruction is somewhat peculiar. She never makes the children spell, or pronounce the sound of each division of the word ; but the whole word (such as abominableness, rhodomontade, habiliments, and phrenology) is pronounced at once—as the pupil has, more or less, the power of stitching such syllables together on recollection. By hook or by crook they get on ; screaming to-day, growling to-morrow, and humdrumming on the third day. Then there are hours for *needling* (as they call it), and very prettily the young ones may be said to exercise that needle ; for the two big girls, who last went away, completed, with a trifling exception, the new surplice worn by the curate on the preceding Christmas-day.

It must be confessed that the limits of the school-room are very stinted ; thirty children, on three forms, sitting within a space of ten feet square. What is society without a code of laws ? And what is a code of laws without measures of punishment appointed to the degrees of offence ? Too many of the children, when sent, are *exempted* from punishment—being *received* on that express condition ; and it is curious to observe how rigidly their

parents insist upon the performance of the contract on the part of the schoolmistress. In consequence, all these children are placed upon one form, and the reader need scarcely be told that they are the most refractory part of the community—being at liberty to scratch, and fight, and tear out each others' eyes if they feel so disposed. The parents have only to thank themselves for the consequence. But the mode of punishment usually adopted by our newspaper-loving schoolmistress, is that known by the name of *thimble pie*. The little wretches are made to stand up in a row ; when a pretty large stout thimble, on a finger of no diminutive dimensions, is applied, in the way of *rapping*, to the tops of their heads—the arm of the executioner, once set in motion, not always stopping exactly at the point or head where it should terminate. Twelve children have been known to partake of the same thimble pie at the same time.

There may be yet a few subordinate characters in this “VILLAGE GROUPING,” deserving of some little notice ; but, as we do not pretend to exercise the pencil of a Wilkie, we shall proceed to the execution of our main performance ; slightly intimating, or as it were dotting down upon the canvas, the existence of two *Beer Shops*—of which one was the noted rendezvous of roost-robbers and poachers, and the other the occasional retreat of democratic

debaters and thorough-going radicals. The sign of the first is “The Jolly Butchers;” of the second, “The Hole-in-the-wall.”

One of the fiercest attendants of the latter was Sam Middleditch, a man, who, when he wanted to look wise, and to speak effectively, put on a pair of black spectacles, begrimed with any thing but “learned dust ;” and who was pretty sure to mix up in his anathemas against the government a few biting tirades against “Mother Church.” To give Middleditch his due, he usually took his cue from Mr. Spark, the blacksmith ; having no personal objection to enter a church, provided he could take the lead in singing bass, in the gallery, on a Sunday afternoon, when the service was more fully attended. But Middleditch, a cordwainer by trade, had itching ears and an active tongue, which frequently brought him into disgrace with the vicar and the squire.

It was night—when three of a desperate gang of poachers and house-breakers resolved to meet at the “*Jolly Butchers*,” for any purpose but that of *mirth*. The park of Mr. Ponton had not had its preserves much thinned, as the shooting season had not long begun. It was well known that all the world—or the village world and its neighbourhood—were to be assembled at Hasleby Hall on the following day ; and a determined plot was laid by Stubbings,

Jobson, and Crankum (three notorious poachers) to "have a *frolic*" on the same evening, and snare and bring away a few round dozens of the "long-tails." They would be joined by three more, at the least, and well supplied with sturdy cudgels and resolute hearts. As they plotted this scheme, they cowered round the fire, without a candle, rubbed their hands, chuckled with anticipated triumph, and ordered "another quart." But as the discourse and glee went round, they forgot to draw the window-curtain—till Crankum, jumping up, and calling them blockheads, drew it softly and carefully—unmindful of a large hole in the pane at the further extremity.

Mr. Ruffham, the apothecary, was just returning from one of those wearisome and profitless rounds, where a country practitioner may earn fourteen shillings, including two accouchements, and lose nearly as much in horse-flesh and bodily fatigue—when taking the "Jolly Butchers" as the last call on his return, he tied his horse to the door ; and unceremoniously, as was his custom, went up stairs to see whether Mr. Smithers, the master, was yet alive, or in the agonies of dissolution. He had had three fits of the "*delirium tremens*;" and to the compassionate, as well as skilful, eye of Mr. Ruffham, he appeared to be in the struggles of death : the curate, the kind Mr. Thomson, had just

quitted his bed-side—having put up the last prayers, which are only resorted to in extremity.* The dying man was utterly insensible—rolling his globular and blood-shot eyes upwards and downwards, this way and that—and breathing with extreme difficulty, from the awful and sure precursor of death, *the rattles*. His head was enlarged, and his face covered with deep scarlet patches or flushes of erysipelas. His wife was kneeling by the side of him in tears.

“ Is there no hope, Mr. Ruffham ? Wretch as he has lived, and wretch as I fear he will die,

* The prayers, here alluded to, are “a prayer for a sick person, when there appeareth little hope of recovery,” and “a commendatory prayer for a sick person at the point of departure.” They are eminently beautiful and impressive ; as is, indeed, the whole service, with one or two exceptions, which, in the contemplated revision of our liturgy, (and God speed it!) may be easily rectified, or dispensed with. A severe trial once befel the author. It will be observed, that the expression THE ENEMY occurs twice during this form of service : thus—“ Let the enemy have no advantage of him,” and “ Defend him (or her) from the danger of the enemy.” “ *What enemy?* ” said once a highly sensitive young person, sinking under consumption. “ I know of none, and I dread none. Why do you *create* one? ” Such a result was natural—and it proved to be harmless : but in over-heated imaginations (which sometimes strengthen in proportion to bodily weakness) this ENEMY has been embodied in a direful shape, and endued with awful attributes. If tranquillity of mind be anywhere, it should be at the HOUR OF DEPARTURE.

I would yet have him with me a little longer. Mr. Thomson says there is no harm in this wish?"

The medical attendant just felt the fluttering and expiring pulse of his patient—looked at the wife — shook his head — and quietly observing that "nothing could save him"—wished her a good night, and walked softly down stairs. On seeking his steed, he found it was stolen. The increasing noise in the room, where the conspirators had assembled, led him immediately in that direction. On opening the door he found only *two*. The third had decamped with his horse. He remonstrated, accused, threatened : they returned his fire with, at least, equal determination—adding, that they were not obliged to look "after the doctor's horse!" Mr. Ruffham only sharply observed, that he should not fail to "look after *them*,"—and left the house. As he got into the open air, he heard a scream up-stairs, from Mrs. Smithers—which announced the departure of her husband : this was quickly followed by three cheers from below, in token of triumph over the doctor ! Such mingled sounds were horrifying, but it is an epitome of life's drama. Mr. Ruffham precipitated his retreat homewards.

As he is sitting before the fire—surrounded by a happy wife and a knot of prattling children ("domus et placens uxor"), be it permitted us to say a word

of his calling or profession. Of all the callings, that of a medical man, in the country, is doubtless among the most trying and severe. If his practice be the *leading* practice of the neighbourhood, so much the worse and the better: the worse, because he has not twelve consecutive hours which he can call his own: the better, because he puts more “money into his purse” in consequence. Neither night nor day—nor summer nor winter—are security from interruption. The ladies will be confined whenever they please, at all seasons, and in all places. Hail, rain, sleet, snow, annoy him without ceremony.

He has gone over, and returned from the *Cotswold Hills*, in Gloucestershire, when snow has lain five inches deep upon the public road—and the half-sovereign, which that perilous journey has entitled him to, may be probably withheld for the next two years. Nor elder wine, nor brandy, nor cup, nor punch, nor negus, nor tankard, “cool” or hot—reaches his lips as he tarries, or as he sets out on his return. It is dogged wretchedness within, and dogged darkness without: and, as it should seem, he may lose his horse into the bargain! Yet the individual, of whom we are now discoursing, neither flinched from the most irksome toils, nor pressed heavily upon the poor man’s pocket. He had witnessed scenes (at once the pri-

vilege and the sorrow of his profession) of the deepest distress—where mental excitement has helped to give an acuter edge to bodily suffering. He returns to his happy home ; and every time that he eyes his beloved spouse, he says inwardly to himself, “ verily there is truth in the report that she is about the prettiest woman in the country !—but her beauty is only secondary to her domestic worth and virtues.”

But the day is waning apace ; and the guests are thinking of putting on their best draperies for Hasleby Park. The Squire had, within a few days, received an acquisition to his inmates. Of these, the first was the Reverend Dr. Glossop, of * * * College, Oxford, a gentleman making rapid strides towards his grand climacteric, and entitled, in consequence, in his own opinion, to advance dogmas and fulminate anathemas with unsparing severity. He was a relation of Mrs. Ponton, and therefore the Squire bore all his *brusquerie* with unruffled temperament.

Kind-hearted and well meaning he was said to be ; but acting, so as to render the first equivocal, and to neutralise the second ; in short, he was a fair good specimen of the old, deep-mouthered, full-flavoured, port wine school of Oxford divinity. If you denied his “minor,” he looked with a sort of simpering contempt upon you ; but if you denied,

combatted, and conquered his “*major*,” the room could scarcely contain him. Doubt the good effects of the “Oxford Tracts,” and a thunder-storm was sure to follow. Speak respectfully and kindly of the regius professor of Divinity there, and the meek phrases of “hypocrite and serpent” (“*latet anguis in herba*,”) were sure to fall from his charitable lips:—but, taken off this scent, he ceased to be a dogmatist and a bore.

Dr. Glossop's visit was purely accidental. Opposed to this gentleman, in years, figure, attainments, profession, and powers to please, was young Mr. Tyndale, of Coverdale Hall; a descendant of the great man of that name to whom is due the imperishable glory of having first published the New Testament, from his own version, in our vernacular tongue. Mr. Tyndale might be some twenty-eight years of age; of fair complexion, smiling aspect, and disposed to partake of all manner of sport, and all manner of conversation.

He was of Caius College, Cambridge; but the bump of mathematics was *equivocally* demonstrated upon his cranium. Joyous of heart, light of limb, dexterous of hand—bringing down wood-cocks to-day, and pheasants to-morrow; at billiards, the *facile princeps*; at waltzing, the *ne plus ultra!* The stream of life ran swiftly and gaily by the side of him: a laugh, a joke, a jump, a

spring, a leap: cart and tierce to-day, racket and foot-ball to-morrow: upon a sheet of ice the most splendid of skaiters, his curvatures being in the true Hogarthian style of grace: upon the chalked boards of the drawing-room, his dress, his action, his *tout-ensemble*, was the admiration of one sex, and almost the envy of the other. He had a sort of holiday-air about him, as if every day of his life was May-day or Christmas-day. His qualities, of this nature, like the plumage of the King Fisher or Humming Bird on the wing, were sometimes too dazzling for distinct vision, or steady appreciation. You sought him in one corner of the room, he had gone to another; this moment, sitting upon the ottoman, he is quoting Tom Moore; the next, Lord Byron, within yonder Elizabethan arm-chair. You desire a snug coze with him; he has quitted the drawing-room for his bedroom. You fancy him asleep; he is sitting up, trimming his lamp, and reading the fifty-first volume of the *Acta Sanctorum*.

Such was Nicholas Tyndale, Esq. at a period of life when fancy, and passion, and excitement, in all their whirling eddies, strive for the mastery over the human heart; but in *him*, that heart continued unstained by moral turpitude, although it had occasionally stimulated to error and indiscretion. The real peccant part of his character was

his insufferable as well as indescribable restlessness. You could pin him down to nothing permanently ; yet that heart once glowed with a gentle emotion ; for Mr. Tyndale had proposed to Julia Cranmer. His proposition, twice made, was mildly but steadily declined. Julia was afraid of such gossamer-materials in the composition of a man, who would necessarily be her partner for life. She did not like such a rapid waltzer for so *long* a period ; as something worse than *vertigo* might ensue.

Meanwhile, deeply smothered within the recesses of her throbbing bosom, Jemima Ponton secretly loved this “admirable Crichton.” To her eye, all his movements were graceful, and all his language was winning. She had never heard the slightest vulgarity escape his lips, nor witnessed any conduct but what might be called the characteristic of a finished gentleman. His very wildness, or elasticity of mind and body, constituted the charm of his society ; for Jemima could rove in fields, repose in bowers, and, like Camilla of old, “skim along the plain,” with all the ardour of the secret object of her choice. If Nicholas Tyndale wished to slumber within the caves of Elephanta to-night, and stand upon one leg on the summit of the great pyramid of Egypt the next morning, he would be sure to find a companion in Jemima Ponton. He was quite ignorant of her partiality for him.

But the guests are all now assembled at Hasleby Park. As usual, Major Dacre was the earliest ; taking out his watch every now and then, as his sister and her family did not make their appearance. At last, there seemed to be a simultaneous concourse of carriages. The same conveyance brought Mr. Clutterbuck and Mr. Ruffham ; but on entering the park-gate, the former thought he saw a man whisking along upon his stolen horse, having a sack fastened upon the saddle behind. There was no time to identify. At length every body had arrived but Sir Joseph and Lady Proudfoot. There were whisperings in this corner of the room, and flirtations in the other ; but the Major, taking the Squire by the arm, walked stiffly up and down the centre of the room with him, every now and then exclaiming, “ how long does this blockhead, Sir Joseph, intend keeping us from our dinner ? ” The Squire sought his lady’s advice ; who rang the bell, and gave out the “ note of preparation ” to the attendant servant. As the whole party, sixteen in number, had occupied their respective places at the dinner table, the carriage of Sir Joseph Proudfoot drove swaggeringly up, with two footmen behind ; and the inmates had the inexpressible mortification of finding all the higher chairs occupied when they entered the room. They both seemed to be struck of a heap ; not from the

sense of shame, which good breeding would have engendered, for the tardiness of their appearance—but from downright spite and vexation at finding the *lower* seats only unoccupied for their reception. Either accident or design marshalled the company in very curious couples. Reginald Cranmer found the arm of Caroline Ponton encircled within his own; Charles Ponton, that of Marianne Cranmer; Nicholas Tyndale was paired with Jemima Ponton; and although Mrs. Ponton, from courtesy and good-breeding, selected Major Dacre for her dinner associate, that worthy gentleman contrived, somehow not to heed it, but to sidle up to Mrs. Danvers—who, on receiving the Major's challenge of his arm, was pleased to remark that “Major Dacre did her great honour.” The Major seemed to be seven feet high as he conveyed his prize into the dining-room.

One or two other traits are deserving of a slight notice. As Reginald Cranmer was escorting his partner, Caroline Ponton, the latter trembled somewhat, as her arm rested upon his. “I hope you are not ill, Miss Ponton?”

“Oh no! I have had a chill on me all the morning; but we shall be merry and warm presently.” Now it is just possible that some one of my readers may attribute motives or causes for this trembling, the very reverse of the *real* one.

The fact was, that through some unguarded channel—either from the lips of her brother, or of Marianne Cranmer—Caroline Ponton had heard of the direful meeting of Charles and the Individual who was then conducting her into the dinner apartment. Yet why should our Caroline keep looking three times at the *face* of Reginald Cranmer, for once upon her plate? And why should our Hero keep telling her, during the repast, that she absolutely ate nothing?

CHAPTER X.

POLEMICS OF THE DINING AND DRAWING ROOMS.

I KNOW not what may have been the usual good or ill fortune of the generality of my readers, but it has been the frequent fate of the author of *Cranmer* to partake of large and splendid dinner-entertainments, when the *brightest* object at table was the épergne or the candelabra; when guests were plentiful, and conversation scant; when servants were nearly as plentiful as guests, and you could scarcely get your plate taken away, or your bread renewed. There is, perhaps, no species of conviviality more chilling, pompous, and repulsive than a regular set-out dinner party in the great city of London. You may, or you may not, have the good fortune to know the name of the lady or gentleman by whom you are sitting—for the English too frequently add to their naturally morbid taciturnity and coldness by withholding the very means of enlivening the one and warming the other. You may, or you may not, in consequence, speak ill, or

disparagingly, or equivocally, of that same neighbour's near relation, or best friend : for how is instinct to direct us here ? A meeting the next morning on Wimbledon Common may, or may not, tread upon the heels of a dinner to-day in Belgrave-square. And then the costliness of the banquet !—the perpetual shifting of the side-dishes !—the besieging of your person !—neither head nor elbows knowing rest. What has been said during the last half-hour ? “ Grisi was sadly out of tune on Saturday evening ;” or “ the rector was tiresomely long in his discourse last Sunday morning.”—“ How suffocatingly hot at Lady C.'s — on Tuesday last !”—“ What a dull, dead piece of business was *The Ancient** last night !” And so forth.

Of a complexion very different from that of the preceding, was the DINNER PARTY at Hasleby Park ; of which it is equally my intention and delight to make special mention. With slight exceptions, the whole sixteen were upon something like intimate terms with each other ; and yet, eight out of this number were evidently assorted, or consorted, so as to make private chit-chat preferable to general discussion. The Squire exerted himself to the utmost, as did his excellent lady, to diffuse conversation generally over the whole table ; the former challenging liberally, but getting scarcely

* The Ancient Concert, usually abbreviated as above.

any acceptance of his challenges from the couples who have been noticed at the conclusion of the last chapter.

The deep-toned voice of Dr. Glossop made up, however, for the partial silence of others. That learned and readily-armed divine flew at all topics, and strove to carry away all the glory attendant upon their discussion. The vicar was rather earnest than loud: the curate, rather anxious than communicative. Mr. Clutterbuck maintained his usual taciturn discretion, till some allusion was made to the last edition of Burn's "Ecclesiastical Law"—when Dr. Glossop, coming forward with what he was pleased to call the *Phlosboterotondodon* of the argument, was floored by his unsparing antagonist in an instant.

Sir Joseph Proudfoot, as was his wont, maintained an erect position, exercising rather his palate than his tongue—enlarging in cheek and chest at every course upon the table—slightly smacking his lips at the old brown sherry of Messrs. Shaw and Maxwell, and once condescending to smile when Miss Jemima Ponton praised the shape of the horse (emblem of the Guelphic Order of Knighthood) dangling at his breast. Lady Proudfoot sat by the Squire's left hand; and Mrs. Cranmer at his right—at the bottom of the table. "Come," said the Squire to each of the ladies, "shall we make a

trio of it, and take some Champagne together?" It was evident that Lady Proudfoot thought it very strange, perhaps a vulgar thing, to drink in *trios*; but it was not less evident that she enjoyed the Champagne exceedingly.

"My dear, madam," said the gay and generous-hearted host, turning to Mrs. Cranmer, and inflicting upon her left hand a slight, unseen pressure, "you cannot think how happy you have all this day made me on your good brother's account!" Mrs. Cranmer was about to answer, as well as she could—considering how her eyes gave evidence of what was going on at the bottom of her heart—when the mellow voice of Major Dacre at the top of the table, addressed to the Squire, was heard to ask what "*he* had done that he should not be challenged to a glass of Johannisberg, by Squire Ponton?" Of course the challenge was not given twice—the latter only remarking, on lifting the wine to his lips, "ah! my dear Major, it would be Stein if it *could*." The Major bowed on receiving the compliment,* and turning to Mrs. Ponton and Mrs. Danvers, alternately, gave them a particular account of the vintage of that high-prized wine; "which," added he, "is nowhere, to my knowledge, drank in such high perfection as at the table of his Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex."

* See page 59, *ante*.

The conversation was now beginning, if the expression may be allowed, to *steam* as much as the dishes, the voice of the Oxford Doctor of Divinity still maintaining its ascendancy—when the butler put a note into Mr. Pounton's hand, to which a ready answer was required. For a slight half-minute all eyes were directed to the bottom of the table, and a silence in proportion was observed.

“Very well,” said the master of the mansion, “the sooner the better—that’s all. Gentlemen, I may require your services in the course of the evening in more ways than one.”

“In every way imaginable,” said Nicholas Tyndale, Esq.—jumping up as if he wished to leap through the window!

“You mistake me; not at this moment, but before you put on your night-caps.”

“Oh! a dance! a dance!” exclaimed Marianne and Jemima.

“A fiddle-stick,” answered the Squire. “Let us be quiet and happy.”

“I love to mingle a little *noise* with my happiness.” said Major Dacre.

“You may get plenty before you retire to rest,” replied the host.

This only added to the mystery, and to the torture of his guests; but as good-humour and good wine prevailed, it produced only more mirth, by the

Squire's rigid determination not to disclose it, "no, not even to his better half." This assurance seemed to disarm it of all *fatal* result; and the chat, and anecdote, and general jollity seemed to increase in a three-fold ratio; although, to a shrewd observer of the human character, through that usually correct index, the countenance, it was obvious that Dr. Glossop was only looking to the moment, when, on the retirement of the ladies, he could let fly another *Phlosboterotondodon* battering-ram of argument, against the entrenchments of Mr. Clutterbuck the magistrate. Joy is brief; sorrow is long. The general mirth, even of this dinner-party, must have an end—on the breaking-up of those whose countenances enliven, and whose conversation humanizes, all well-regulated societies.

The emphatic moment arrived when the lady at the top of the table was striving to catch the eyes of Mrs. Cranmer, Lady Proudfoot, and Mrs. Danvers—and having succeeded, rose gradually to her full height, looked graciously right and left, slightly inclined the head—and backwards went all the chairs on which the company had been seated; but their rising was *not*

"as the sound
Of thunder, heard remote."

Charles Ponton flew to the door; kept sentinel there while the gay cavalcade egressed into the

drawing-room, and by one of those awkward and ridiculous instances of *gaucherie* which will sometimes happen in the best regulated societies, shut Marianne Cranmer *in*!—not at *such* a moment, surely, for his exclusive gratification! A shout of laughter ensued; which the *ejected* seemed to enjoy with the best of them.

On the retirement of the ladies, the table was necessarily headed by the Squire, while his son Charles graced the bottom. The word “graced” is not incautiously used; for, with Reginald Cranmer on one side, and Nicholas Tyndale on the other, there was a constant display of intellectual fire-works—rockets, mounting in all directions, and emitting colours of all hues! The seniors seemed naturally to bestir themselves about the president of the banquet. Mr. Ruffham was the first to make play in conversation; detailing the night adventure at the “Jolly Butchers,” including both the theft of his horse, and the death of the master of the public-house.

“Did he die and make no sign?”—inquired Dr. Glossop somewhat eagerly.

“None that I observed; but he was in fact insensible, and absolutely *in articulo mortis*,” replied, very calmly, Mr. Ruffham.

“‘*In articulo mortis*’—say you, sir? and no priest to attend, “to lift his drooping soul, and point the road to heaven?””

"Dr. Glossop," said Mr. Thomson, the curate, "he was attended by *me*; and I trust I did my duty."

"If you stuck to the rubric, you could not *fail* to do so."

"To whatever I might chuse to *stieke*, sir, I trust I did my duty; you are not privileged—"

"Gently, my dear Thomson," said Mr. Markham, half frowning and half coaxing, "you probably do not see the drift of Dr. Glossop's argument."

"That would require a lynx-eyed vision indeed," responded Mr. Thomson, with a smile, and in a *sotto voce*, to the vicar.

"Pray, sir," observed Major Dacre to the Oxford champion, "don't you think there are occasions when a clergyman of the Church of England, like a clergyman of any other persuasion, may use his *discretion*?"

"His *indiscretion* sir, you mean;" remarked the man of the very high church—not allowing the Major to finish his sentence, but adding abruptly, "I do not mean to be rude—"

"I cannot suppose it, sir," rejoined the Major, "in a gentleman of your profession, and at your time of life; but allow me to finish my sentence without interruption." Dr. Glossop bowed, raising his right hand to his breast. The Major loosened

the tightened curve of his eye-brows. “ I should be unfeignedly desirous of knowing whether a clergyman, of a CHURCH, which I honour and esteem beyond all other ecclesiastical establishments in the world, be or be not at liberty to adopt that particular course which the unanticipated necessity, or peculiarity of the case—unprovided for by our ritual—may point out to him ? In fact, is his *heart* or his *head* only to control him in such instances ?”

“ *Both*, sir, unquestionably,”—exclaimed the vicar and the curate at the same moment, and with one breath.

“ Pardon me, gentlemen,” replied Dr. Glossop, “ there is but *one* duty to perform—written in express words—and that duty *only* can and ought to be performed by a member of the Established Church, who has *sworn* so to perform it.”

“ Pray, Dr. Glossop, may I take the liberty of asking,” remarked the magistrate,—who by this time was beginning to wax warm, as he remembered the castigation he had recently inflicted on his opponent —“ whether the *oath*, in this instance, be not only an exceedingly *qualified* one, but whether it be not a perfect absurdity to control human feelings, on such occasions, by any formulary of prayer or exposition ?”

“ Why, sir,” resumed the Oxford divine, “ only conceive both the mischief and absurdity which

would follow, if there were *not* certain boundaries—the *certi denique fines*—to be cautiously attended to. There would be, otherwise, as much rant and raving in the clergyman as in the invalid."

"Pardon me, Dr. Glossop," (observed the Major—pointing his forefinger, now stiffened, and nearly as long as his study-poker, towards his opponent)—"but it strikes me that you are here begging the question. Why should there of *necessity* be 'rant and raving' in the invalid? Poor Smithers, whose death, as mentioned by my friend Mr. Ruffham, has given rise to this discussion, had no physical power whatever to rave or rant. He was at life's lowest ebb. He could no more comprehend, than he could hear, the pastoral instruction of Mr. Thomson. Had his senses been whole, don't you think our excellent friend, the curate, would have read him a lecture upon——"

"Sir, with submission," (observed the doctor, flushing deeply red)—"curates have no business to read *lectures*. There is the office for visiting the sick in our ritual—and let them keep exclusively to THAT."

Four voices were immediately let loose in reply; but the Squire called to order.—"Gentlemen," observed he, "as we are, thank God, at this present moment *well* and *hearty*, let us have nothing to do with the office for attending *the*

sick. I have invited you here on this day, to do me the especial honour of partaking of my humble hospitality, not to discuss corn laws, or ecclesiastical laws, or any other laws than those of good fellowship, good breeding, and good feeling : all of which are sure to be exercised in drinking the toast which I am about to propose.—“ Major Dacre, and our warmest congratulations on his return to Dacre Hall !”

Charles Ponton insisted upon the “ three times three.” Reginald Cranmer moved an amendment —“ thirty times thirty.”—Nicholas Tyndale—“ till dawn of day !” To the infinite credit of the redoubted disputant of the Oxford school, be it recorded, that his cheer was heard above that of every other. Lablache could scarcely have been more effective.

It is not intended to report the reply of Major Dacre—“ warm from the heart, and faithful to its fire.” It never overflowed the boundary of correct taste, although stimulated by the warmest gushes of a grateful heart. Among the most classical, few men could have given such point to their expressions as did the Major in his reply to the honour conferred upon him. Like a stream which has been diverted out of its natural course, the conversation was no sooner resumed, than it took a turn to matters of clerical import : for, to speak the truth,

though three clergymen were present, both Major Dacre and Mr. Clutterbuck rather *favoured* this subject of discussion than otherwise.

The young men having listened patiently to, or partaken liberally of, the *first*, did not seem much disposed to partake as liberally of a *second* course of such an intellectual banquet—and were about to quit the room, as if by one consent—when Mr. Ponton begged they would not leave till he had made them acquainted with the purport of the *Note* he had received—and which he begged might not be communicated to the ladies.

“ ‘Tis listening fear and dumb amazement all,—”

while the Squire told them that there were good reasons for apprehending a sharp brush with some poachers, in the further wood, that evening.

“ Crankum’s crew, as I suspected !” shouted Mr. Ruffham. “ My horse is with them, for a ducat.”

“ My body and spirit shall soon be with them, for a thousand ducats !”—exclaimed Tyndale.

“ Arm, arm, ye brave !” ejaculated the Major.

“ We will make prisoners of them all in a trice ! There will be a splendid moon, and

“ ‘ This night, this glorious night, the *rogues* are ours !’ ”*

shouted Reginald Cranmer—smacking both hands, and anon smiting his thigh. So saying, and with

* HOMER, *Iliad*, Book viii.; but read there “ fleet ” for “ *rogues*. ”

the unanimous plaudits of the company, the juniors left the room to join the ladies—to bagatelle—to chess—to sing—to “riddle me right”—to out-do Monsieur Tostett as a card-conjuror—to talk softly or laugh loudly as the occasion might prompt. Yet, now and then they were all three seen to be huddling together, and shaking their fists, but not at *each other*. We will leave them in the unmolested enjoyment of these innocent and mirthful recreations. The seniors are in deep divan, demanding our instant attendance.

Sir Joseph Proudfoot, who had hitherto maintained a dogged silence, or doubtful neutrality, here continued the thread of the discourse (or debate, as the reader pleases), by drily observing to Dr. Glos-sop, that “it was a pity so many words had been rather wasted than used about the form of prayer for attending the sick: all he hoped to live to see was, that every clergyman would reside at his living, and thus become the true Christian over-seer of his flock. How could regiments be exer-cised in the absence of their commanding officers?”

The vicar, conceiving this to be a sharp shot fired at himself, because he had a *second* piece of prefer-ment, lost no time in returning it, by quietly, yet pointedly, demanding of the Hanoverian Knight, “Whether he was not the commander of a regi-ment of infantry?”

“To be sure I am, sir.”

"And pray, Sir Joseph, where may your regiment be stationed just now?"

"In Nova Scotia, I believe."

"*Believe!* are you not *sure?*"

"Not exactly."

"Why, how is this? and how are the poor men to be properly exercised in the 'absence of their commanding officer?'"

"The lieutenant-colonel, the major, the senior captain takes care of that."

"Just so, sir; and my excellent curate, the Reverend Gabriel Thomson, takes care of my flock here during the eight months that I am compelled to be resident at Canterbury." (Here Mr. Thomson covered his face with his pocket handkerchief, under pretence of blowing his nose.) "May I take the liberty of asking you another question?"

"As many as you please, sir."

"Is it a long time ago, say one or two months, or years, since you saw your regiment?"

"Sir, I have *never* yet seen it."

Every voice was about to thunder an anathema against Sir Joseph—whose position, to say the truth, was becoming a little perilous; but the Major "flew to the rescue," by shrewdly, though softly observing, that "when Sir Joseph had been properly 'institued and inducted' into his *own* flock, he would probably be less severe in his stric-

tures upon the guardians of other flocks." A false position is sometimes as dangerous in conversation as in a field of battle—or even in the House of Lords or Commons.

Dr. Glossop quickly opened another battery of the same kind of shot, by saying that "he hoped, at all events, those who had voted for the abolition of the *Test Acts*, would be doomed to drink nothing but *gunpowder-tea* for the remainder of their lives, and that some Guy Faux would be found to give it ignition." Although this metaphor seemed a little confused or incomprehensible, it was quite clear that he, who used it, was a man for "strong measures—" come what may.

"As to your gunpowder-tea," said Mr. Clutterbuck, sticking closely to the haunches of his former antagonist, "you are not perhaps aware, sir, that it is both a most expensive and a deliciously-flavoured tea; and that, for myself, I should desire no better fare for the remainder of my days, than such a specimen of Chinese produce—so that if the *abolitionists* in question are to be thus punished for their conduct, you would perhaps make speedy converts of the *supporters* of the *Test Acts*."

"That's as it may turn out, Mr. Clutterbuck; but I presume the tea in question is strong, and therefore disorganizing to stomach and head?"

"Surely, Dr. Glossop, that must depend upon the *quantity* usually put into the teapot?"

"Very well, sir, the teapot, if you please; but I don't see how Guy Faux could get into a teapot?"

"Not unless your ingenuity contrived to put him there, Dr. Glossop." Here the high-church champion, compelled to droop his banner somewhat, helped himself to a slice of melon, as a cooler, peradventure; and filling his glass with a bumper of the Squire's oldest port, exclaimed, "The immortal memory of JOHN *Fox*, the exterminator of GUY *Faux*. I hope we are all right here?"—turning significantly to the vicar and curate alternately.

"Were these two men, evidently of the same name at the beginning, *related* to each other?" quietly observed the Squire.

"As fire and water, as honey and gall, as heaven and —." Here Dr. Glossop stopped with a short, significant grunt, or hum, as if he had clenched a long, troublesome nail; but it was clear to the company that he was floundering at every step of his argument, and had contrived to *hustle* his own intellects.

Mr. Ruffham, whom this conversation must have necessarily put a little in the back-ground, here ventured to take courage, and come forward with a very simple question. "He had heard that Fox,

the martyrologist, was somewhat losing ground (as his son's tutor had told him,) in a certain university?"

"Name, sir; *name* your university. It is a fearful charge," continued the doctor of divinity.

"Oxford."—"Oxford, sir!" cried out Messrs. Ruffham, Markham, and Thomson, at the same moment!

"One at a time, gentlemen; 'one down and t'other come on'—as we used to say at Harrow school."

"First, name your authority." Here Dr. Glossop tucked himself up all of a heap, as if he was preparing for the most strenuous contest; in which the whole was to conclude with the *Phlosboterontodon* battering-ram; but the entrance of Mr. Ponton's head servant, quietly announcing that tea and coffee were waiting in the adjoining apartment, suggested to the master of the house the propriety of cutting the "POLEMICS" short.

"I will hear thee (said the Squire to Dr. Glossop) at a more convenient season." The company received the invitation with the smile of good-humour; and wisely so. Had these "polemics of the dining room" thus continued, every pheasant must have been stolen from the preserves in the upper wood; as Dr. Glossop declared he should have spoken the better part of *two hours* in refutation of so foul a charge!

From *these* “polemics” therefore we stroll, as if by instinct, to those of the *drawing-room*. The ladies are all prepared to receive their guests, but where are the young chieftains? Mrs. Ponton announced their speedy return, for that they were only gone to consult Ned Chowler, the gamekeeper, about to-morrow’s sport. The Sqûire took the hint in a trice, and said nothing, though he was fidgetty to excess till his son’s re-appearance. They conferred together a little second, and soon mixed with the company.

“Now, Major Dacre, we are going to put you out of conceit with your Boyce and Jackson. We shall make *Mozart* and *Winter* ride over them with a rough jacket. Do, my dear Mrs. Cranmer and Mrs. Danvers, favour us the ‘*Parto ti lascio addio*’ of the latter.” Good breeding always begets good breeding; and the duet quickly followed the request. You might have heard a pin drop during its performance.

Mrs. Cranmer, in earlier life, was gifted with one of those pure, sweet, liquid voices, which, like a clear current coursing over a bed of silver sand, woos and wins its way through every obstacle. From desuetude, it had occasionally contracted a little roughness or inequality; but it was of first-rate *texture*, as the learned designate a thing impassive to sight and touch. Mrs. Danvers took the second,

or the part formerly executed by Grassini. A sort of smothered or inwardly gurgling feeling and expression of delight followed from all parts on its termination: and from the smiling serenity of Dr. Glossop's countenance, that resolute polemic seemed at once to have got rid of all thoughts of gunpowder-tea, and of both the Foxes. Major Dacre never quitted the back of his sister's chair for an instant, concentrating the lustre of his expressive eyes upon the mouth of the widow, as it opened (not horizontally and mechanically, and therefore ineffectively, like the generality of English singing ladies, but) perpendicularly, wide, and expressively—as do the mouths of canaries and goldfinches: as did those more powerful and spirit-stirring mouths of Billington, Mara, and Catalani. The Major insisted upon an *encore*: and, to his credit be it spoken, the champion of high church ultra orthodoxy joined in the request.

Presently Miss Ponton and her sister Jemima were led to the front of the orchestra, for the “*Ah Perdona*” of Mozart. The harmony of this far-famed duet has been pronounced to be too luscious. It was indeed “honey doubly distilled,” as executed by the lips now called into play for its performance. Caroline Ponton (the elder) should seem to have out-rivaled Mrs. Cranmer, in spite of Reginald’s committing more than one mistake, in not turning

over the leaves in time—having his eyes fixed rather on *cause* than *effect*. Boyce and Jackson were getting fast into the rear, when Caroline, with Marianne Cranmer, gave them the *coup de grâce* by warbling the “*Sul’ aria,*” from the *Nozze di Figaro*, in such a strain of delicious harmony, as well as unvarying accuracy, as had not been heard since the united voices of Sontag and Malibran. Here Caroline Ponton was the *Countess* and Marianne Cranmer the *Susannah*.

To observe the forgetfulness of Reginald Cranmer and Charles Ponton—now shifting their seats, now tattooing with their fingers, now leaning on their opened hands—now lolling upon a sofa, and now upon an arm-chair—were absolutely ludicrous. The ladies, to the eyes of the Squire, seemed inwardly to enjoy the torture they were inflicting.

To the surprise and delight of the whole party, young Tyndale came forward and challenged Marianne Cranmer to the duet “*Crudel perchè finora,*” in Mozart’s immortal opera last-named. He got on a little too fast at first, it must be confessed ; but there were passages so ably, and even brilliantly executed, that another lady present might have been secretly envying *Susannah* the accomplishments of her *Count Almaviva*. Even Lady Proudfoot, on being questioned as to the ability evinced in this duet, condescendingly al-

lowed, that “it was very pretty—sweetly pretty—hardly to be expected at such a distance from London.” Mrs. Ponton bounced away from her like a parched pea. For once Major Dacre refused whist, long or short; preferring to turn over the prints in Daniel’s *Rural Sports*, especially that exquisite one of the *Retriever*—it reminded him so of his “dear *Dash*.” “Is it not a strong resemblance, Mrs. Danvers?”

“The dog himself,” replied the widow.

In another place a volume of Piranesi was minutely examined. “Is the castle of Fürstenhoff to be found here?” said young Cranmer.

“That is near the *Black Forest*,” replied Dr. Glossop, “and therefore cannot be found in a work relating to the antiquities of *Italy*.” My readers will judge of the fixedness of Reginald’s look, when he turned to Dr. Glossop on the remark which had just fallen from him. What could *he* possibly know of the CASTLE OF FURSTENHOFF?

CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT BATTU.

REGINALD CRANMER was in the act of making up to Dr. Glossop, to inquire “what he knew of Fürstenhoff Castle?” when the carriage of Sir Joseph and Lady Proudfoot was announced, and those grave personages lost no time in getting into it. As they were considered to be the “*kill joys*” in all circles which they visited, it may be surprising how they came to find themselves at Hasleby Park; but the Squire, as a neighbour, and in order to “lead a peaceable life,” from pure good-nature was pleased to invite them. Miss Proudfoot, their daughter and only child, had been also invited: but papa and mama thought that she might by possibility come in contact with some uproarious and vulgar young gentleman, at the Squire’s table, and therefore invented an excuse, which, on these occasions, and in common parlance, may be better designated by the certain monosyllable—the more so, as Miss Proudfoot had been seen that morning on

horseback, in solemn singleness, with the groom—
instructed always to keep at the distance of fifty
yards behind her : yet Olivia (for that was the
young lady's Christian name) "had a sad cold."

Now it was, perhaps, as well for Olivia to have
staid at home, whether her cold was feigned or real ;
for her proud and silly mother was always " bring-
ing her out " to sing, while the poor creature herself
could not " bring out " half-a-dozen musical notes
from her own throat. Besides, she had been " out "
in another direction of late. She had twice run the
round of the *Almack*-circle, and who, among the
inmates of Hasleby Park, had held up their heads
in *that* quarter ?

Let us return from geese to human beings. The
departure of the Proudfoots was the signal for
simultaneous merriment. The valve, so long closed,
poured forth the contents of the juicy cask in ex-
hilarating abundance. "Up and be doing, my dear
Major!" said the Squire, who had just got that
true complement of Falernian which gives a
Claude-Lorraine tint of gaiety (as the learned
call it) to all surrounding objects ; and placing
Mrs. Danvers in the foreground of the picture,
urged her as his partner for an immediate *dance*.
"Not so, indeed," observed the Squire's lady ; "if
the Major dances, I aspire to the honour of his
hand." It was not an easy thing to confound a

man of Major Dacre's collected nerves ; but whatever inclination might induce on one side, there was good breeding and the laws of honour on the other—and in a trice the Major led forth the mistress of the house. The Squire somewhat *precipitated* himself towards Mrs. Cranmer, and claimed her as his partner for a country dance. The clapping of the first pair of hands was the signal for a “general up-rising ;” and the old seemed to be full as joyous and elastic as the young ;—when it was gently whispered in the ear of Charles Ponton (who, at the moment, having selected Marianne Cranmer for his partner, might have stood so near to that young lady that both might be “looking babies in each other's eyes”*) “that Ned Chowler was in the hall, wanting to see him.” If ever there was a *contretemps*, this was one. If ever a human being felt disposed to struggle between an impulse of gallantry on the one hand, and a sense of courage and daring on the other, it was Charles Ponton at this identical moment. “Excuse me, dear Marianne (they were betrothed) for one minute only.” One, two, three, five, fifteen minutes elapsed : the whole party was as a clubbed regiment—for where was the heir-apparent of Hasleby Park ?

On his return, the sunshine of his countenance

* Sir JOHN SUCKLING is, I believe, the original author of this often-used expression.

had changed into shade and seriousness. He sought his father. They conferred together for a little moment; when, with admirable presence of mind, looking at his watch, the latter exclaimed, "There was plenty of time for a good hour's frolic, as the carriages had not yet arrived. Up and be doing." Mrs. Danvers seated herself at the piano. Caroline Ponton played the harp. They struck every note in unison, and to perfection.

"*Nunc — pede libero
Pulsanda tellus :*"*

exclaimed the Major, and off he went with Mrs. Ponton, as if the blood of early manhood was rioting in his veins. The Squire "followed hard upon." Mr. Clutterbuck was fortunate with Mrs. Markham, who, in a sly corner be it said, was the best dancer of the three females. The Vicar aspired to Julia Cranmer; and Charles Ponton was walking rather than bounding with his beloved Marianne. Wherefore was this? Young Tyn-dale, in imitation of Horace of old, was "knocking his head against the stars"† with Jemima Ponton, whose beautiful figure and elastic feet might have competed with any of the Taglionis of the day. And then her countenance—so blithe and so *débon-*

* *Horat.*—Lib. 1, Ode 37.

† "Sublimi feriam sidera vertice.—Lib. 1, Ode 1, v 36.

naire!—so redolent of youthful beauty, joy, and innocence—so irradiated, as it were, with “the purple light of love,” kept in uniform and sprightly concord with her feet.

But if she were the Euphrosyne, her sister Caroline was the united Diana and Venus of that evening’s festivity. Her finely-turned arms, in the action of harp-playing, had every opportunity of developing their just proportions—with a grace and effect not to be surpassed by those of a Hamilton. Now her fine, full, hazel eye was seen glittering through the strings of the harp; and now her well-turned head, with her quietly adorned hair, was looking over her left, and now over her right, shoulder; her lips and nostrils expanding or compressing as the music affected her heart.

Where were the eyes of Reginald Cranmer at such a moment? Not absolutely inactive; but ever since Dr. Glossop had dropped a hint of his intimacy with the castle of Fürstenhoff, by having spent three days in its immediate vicinity, our young hero had scarcely quitted his side; and perhaps, he might not choose to dance while Miss Ponton was playing on the harp. “*On ne peut pas disputer pour les gouts.*” To the credit of the High-Church champion, and certainly to the comfort of his associate, there was not, on *this* occa-

sion, the slightest necessity or disposition to bring forward the *Phlosboterotontodon* battering-ram.

It was now high time to give something more than a hint that these festivities must cease. There is always a secret, intelligible, but difficult-to-be-described, spring of action, which orders the fate of *parties* as of *nations*. Some of the carriages had now drawn up ; others were in attendance * * * *

“ Good night, good night, and is it so ?
And must I from my Laura go ?”

In effect, such was the general language on breaking up. But Major Dacre and Mr. Ruffham were privileged men, and might go when they pleased. Meanwhile the Major’s carriage was at the service of the vicar and curate ; and very significant “ good nights ” passed between some of the party on taking leave. It was quite obvious that neither magistrate nor clergyman could be at a **MIDNIGHT BATTU**.

Mrs. Cranmer had taken off Julia and Marianne, with the assurance from Reginald that he would return with his uncle to sleep at Dacre Hall—this, as we have before seen,* being only in the usual course of things. Mrs. Ponton was importuned by the Squire to “ call off ” Caroline and Jemima ; who seemed, in their respective

* See page 82.

spheres, to have “outdone” all their former outdoings on that evening—and Dr. Glossop hoped to have permission to retire to rest, pleading the excuse of a juryman for his non-attendance at the *battu*; namely, that he was sixty years of age. At all events, he was too old for a recruit to fight in such a regiment.

Shakspeare has thrillingly observed :

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.”

Julius Cæsar, Act ii. Sc. 1 (Brutus).

The company had retired. Nor sound of instrument, nor of dancer’s foot, was heard—when, from a preconcerted signal, Chowler, the gamekeeper, with two athletic companions—muffled to the eyes—with limbs cased in the toughest York tan, and with herculean cudgels as knotty as that of Hercules, in each of their right hands—were pronounced to be in attendance in the hall. The Major proposed a conference in an adjoining room; when Chowler was called upon to “give tongue”—and to develope equally his intelligence and his plans. Nothing loth, he quietly observed that Jemmy Quick, the hatter’s apprentice,* had not only seen Stubbings, Jobson, and Crankum sitting together the night preceding, in an obscure apartment, at the “Jolly

* See page 79.

Butchers," but, through a fracture in the window pane, he had *heard* the latter roundly and chucklingly declare, that he would "preciously tickle up the Squire's long-tailers this evening, when the company were kicking up their heels in the drawing-room ;" and further, "that they counted on three 'jolly butchers' to assist them." Quick, on visiting the same spot, a few minutes afterwards, saw Crankum mounted on a horse, which, from the white nose and white fore fetlock, he knew to be Mr. Ruffham's: while, on looking into the room again, he saw only Stubbings and Jobson.

"The evidence is complete," said the Major, rubbing his hands; "up lads, and at 'em!"

"Not quite so hastily, my good Major," replied the apothecary. "As I have a particular interest in this business, having seen my horse bestrode, as I conceive, by Crankum, on entering the park-gate—of course, I am not less anxious to secure my property than to aid and abet in this *sortie*."

"But, my dear uncle," said Reginald, "there is no occasion for *your* presence?" To the bystanders it appeared as if the uncle had felled the nephew to the ground, by one withering look of mingled scorn, contempt, and astonishment.

"Say you *so*, young man? Measure your fortitude by your own fears, and neither insult nor encumber me with your advice. Give it when I

ask for it!" Dire mischief was brewing on both sides; "but a word in season how good is it!"

The gamekeeper, touching the hair on his forehead, (as he would have done his hat, had it been upon his head), quietly remarked, "I beg your pardon, gentlemen, and I hope you won't take offence—but *us three* can tumble the other three over in an instant; besides, we have each, in a concealed side-pocket, a pistol loaded with ball. If we are put to our TRUMPS, we shall be sure to win the GAME."

The squire was smoothing down the Major, and Charles Ponton was smoothing down Reginald Cranmer, when Mr. Ruffham gallantly remarked, that Chowler should take Mr. Tyndale and himself as coadjutors in the coming fray.

"By my faith thou speakest like a man, my most noble Æsculapius. What ho! my rapier and my dagger. I scorn *invisible* implements of death," shouted Nicholas Tyndale, Esq., as he rushed out of the room for the weapons in question. Reginald rushed after; and Charles Ponton rushed after Reginald.

"I have been a little too hasty, if not too testy, with my gallant nephew, I fear," observed the Major, anxiously looking into the Squire's countenance.

"Consider it not so deeply," rejoined the squire;

"but, I really think," added he, "that these young ones may do all the work in question, without being *encumbered* by us old ones—" laying a slight emphasis on the last word but four.

"Well, well ! be it so—" quietly replied Major Dacre; "but what's bred in the bone must at some time or other come out of the flesh: or, as Horace says:

'Quo semel est imbuta recens servavit odorem
Testa diu.'

Is it not so, Reginald?" said he, as the latter returned, while his uncle was in the act of quotation. All was smoothed down in an instant: the one common object, that of *discomfiting the poachers*, having absorbed every other.

"I must bargain only for one thing," said the Squire, on their preparing to take their departure. "Put yourselves under the command of Mr. Ruffham—for young heads are wont to be hot."

"Above all," added the Major, "spare human life. Absolute necessity alone justifies death." The party quietly sallied forth, and were out of sight in two minutes.

For the last half hour the moon had been a good deal clouded, and she was three nights on the wane. A smartish breeze had got up, which, as they approached the covers, seemed to indicate a rough night. At this moment they heard the stable-

clock (about the third of a mile in their rear) strike the hour of twelve. A shrill whistle was then heard in front of them; and they began to fall into rank, and take up ground accordingly. Chowler—who, like a cat, could see as well in the darkest night as in the brightest day, and to whose sharp eyes every by-road and by-path was equally familiar,—took the lead in front, having his York-tanned clad companions, some thirty feet at each side of him, a little in the rear. Mr. Ruffham, with Reginald Cranmer, Charles Ponton, and Nicholas Tyndale, walked two and two immediately behind Chowler's companions. Another whistle, but much fainter, was heard to the right. It should seem that the poachers had changed their position, from an apprehension that they were discovered. The young men now began to be unmindful of discipline, and to talk aloud, and walk in a straggling manner. They were laughing, and calling their opponents “villains and cowards,” when the report of fire-arms was heard, and a ball, whistling by Reginald Cranmer’s right ear, spent its force in the trunk of a fir tree.

“Halt, gentlemen, for God’s sake!” exclaimed Chowler, hurrying back to near them; “you must keep silence for the present. Please to notice that at night people have sharper ears than by day. Pray walk one behind another for a little time,

and as we reach yonder stile (here the moon shone out with a transient splendour), we shall form our plan of attack. I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't fire another shot. This was only to frighten us—to make us stand off."

The blood of the young men, on the narrow escape of Reginald, began to boil in their veins. Tyndale did nothing but flourish his sword with one hand and his dagger with the other. Charles Ponton could have got into Reginald's pocket, so anxiously did he flutter around him with congratulations on his narrow escape. Mr. Ruffham enjoined the strictest compliance with Chowler's order; and they moved rapidly towards the gate.

At this moment the neighing of a horse was heard. "My *Sweet Marjoram*," exclaimed Mr. Ruffham (for so the animal was called by its owner), "for a thousand ducats!" Mr. Ruffham had reiterated Chowler's order in so high a note, that the animal, rode by his master for five years consecutively, could scarcely fail to recognise his master's voice. Another whistle, very strongly articulated, denoted the enemy to be nearing them; but as this was answered by a third whistle, a good deal to the left, the party was balanced about the plan to be pursued.

They reached the gate, where Mr. Ruffham found his "*Sweet Marjoram*" tied to one of the bars, and exceedingly fidgetty and restive as he

approached him. At his feet lay half a score of pheasants ready to be sacked. The animal became perfectly unmanageable, as his master, on approaching him, patted his neck, and pronounced the well-known "*Woiy.*"

"Mount him," said Tyndale; "that is the only way of securing him, or keeping him quiet." Mr. Ruffham, neither deficient in length of leg or skill of horsemanship, leapt upon the animal's back, and off he scampered at a tangent. Two good reasons induced this sudden movement in "*Sweet Marjoram.*" He had been tied to the bar of the gate for five hours, without a mouthful in the shape of either hay, clover, grass, or oats; and he knew that when his master was upon his back, he was sure to return with him to peace and plenty. Moreover the high road was within fifty yards of the spinney, and Mr. Ruffham had no sooner mounted, than the animal broke all bounds and scorned all restraint; for he was blood to the farthest joint of his back bone. A loud laugh instantly followed from the young chieftains. "Their commander had galloped off, and turned his back upon them."

Mr. Ruffham, being in a drawing-room dress, had necessarily no spurs; but he had a strong hand as well as a firm seat—and "*Sweet Marjoram*" was treated in so *decisive* a manner, that, after five mi-

nutes, he returned with his master upon his back at a sort of ambling pace.

“What ho, there!—our commander?” shouted Tyndale—and two of the poachers, glancing like spectres, out of the spinney, ran in the direction of the road.

“There go the scoundrels!” said Mr. Ruffham, but my pistol-bullets shall follow them.” This was merely for effect—for Mr. Ruffham had nothing but a sturdy crab-stick, which had been pretty liberally exercised about the ears and neck of “Sweet Marjoram.”

“Now, gentlemen, now they defy us, and are coming straight up to the scratch,” exclaimed Chowler. “Us *three* will lead.”

“By heaven, no!” said Charles Ponton. “Us *six* will not only lead, but *lick*. Scoundrels and devils!”

Crankum, who headed the foe, not only recognised the voice, but the person, of young Mr. Ponton: and stepping forward, said in the coolest manner imaginable, “ah, Mr. Charles, is it you?”

“Me! yes; and, as I suspect, it is *you*, Ben Crankum. Stand still, and surrender, every soul of you.” The poachers, who had left three guns in the rear of them, as being unfit weapons for close quarters, were five in number.

At this moment, Mr. Ruffham, on “Sweet Marjoram,” threatened their rear: but on a pistol-shot

being fired at his horse—and luckily missing it—Chowler, with his York-tanners, sprung like tigers upon them—and Crankum was secured, and two of his companions floored, in an instant.

“ Stir, you demon, and you die !” exclaimed Tyndale—pointing his long life-guardsman’s sword, which flashed a fearful light by the moon-beam, at the throat of the fallen foe. Of the two remaining poachers, one made a snatch at the bridle of Mr. Ruffham’s horse, striking a tremendous, but unavailing, blow at the head of its rider. Reginald Cranmer here came up, and cleanly levelled the assailant to the earth. The excitement now became general ; but Charles Ponton, ever anxious about Reginald, left Crankum, as he thought, his prisoner, and flew to Reginald’s rescue. Crankum was a large and powerful, as well as a desperate man ; and it is just possible that some few lingering sparks of respect for the eldest son of the Squire, might have helped to soften his natural ferocity, and induced his surrender ; but he was no sooner freed from his captor’s presence, than, letting loose a volley of the most horrible oaths, he swore he would “ do for Chowler ;”—and seeing him advance, let fly a pistol-bullet at his head. The ball might have lodged in the trees, or in the moon—it did not touch Chowler ; who

advancing with incomparable courage of heart, and decision of step, smote his foe on the arm which had directed the bullet, and both arm and pistol fell powerless. Another blow across his shins prostrated Crankum to the earth.

Meanwhile, Nicholas Tyndale, tired of keeping watch over the two men whom Chowler's companions had secured, and anxious that his *steel* should have a *little* taste of the enemy's blood, pursued after the remaining poacher who had now taken to his heels, and threatened him with instant death if he did not surrender.

"Never, to your *skewer*," replied the saucy fugitive.

"Then how like you my *spit*?"—fiercely answered Tyndale; and overtaking him, pricked him in his right side. The fellow staggered fumbling in a side-pocket for a pistol: but Tyndale knew his man better than to allow him such a privilege: and pierced him quite through his right wrist. Writhing in horrible agony, the man yet essayed to fly—but the mischief was done: blood was flowing copiously from his side and wrist—and the victim tumbling suddenly, rolled himself up, and groaned desperately, as if in the agonies of death. Tyndale, on securing the pistol, pulled the trigger, intending merely to discharge it

in the open air, but there was no powder in the touch-hole. Throwing it at the man's head, he sought the field of battle.

Of the two men, whom Chowler's comrade had secured, one became exceedingly uncontrollable, and by dint of mere muscular strength, liberated himself from the silk handkerchief by which his arms had been too carelessly tied. Revenge is sweet, even in cultivated bosoms ! It is madeningly so, sometimes, in coarse and vulgar souls. The man drew his pistol from his side-pocket—and as Chowler was grappling with Crankum on the ground, he fired—the ball penetrating the temple of the *latter*: for the men were so involved or twisted together, that, in the hurrying moment in which the pistol was discharged, it was impossible for the most experienced marksman to take an accurate aim. Chowler now, for the first time, drew and fired his pistol, and the ball penetrated the abdomen of his antagonist ; who fell upon the bleeding and lifeless corpse of his companion. Mr. Ruffham having dismounted from his steed, which he had very carefully secured, now came up, and finding the foe so thoroughly disabled, and in part demolished, sounded a return, rather than a *retreat*.

The dead body of Crankum was placed across Mr. Ruffham's horse, and led by its master

and the three gamekeepers into the village. Thus he, who, a few hours only before, had been mounted upon the same animal—flying in the eager confidence of spoil and prey, to the field of contest,—was now led a dead corpse: his dangling arms on one side of the horse, and his trailing legs on the other. The wind had now got up to a considerable height, driving the scudding clouds across the moon's fair face. In a minute that face was quite obscured, and down fell the rain, enveloping all things in dank and dreary darkness. As the cavalcade returned by the outer gate, where Mr. Ruffham had first recognised the horse and his rider, it was impossible for him not to indulge in reflections of the most serious, yet consoling description. His own life had been jeopardized in the extreme—and those who were now lying upon their beds of down, encircled in the soft arms of slumber (he would necessarily include Mrs. Ruffham in the number), little knew what the occurrences of a **NIGHT**, as well as of a day, might produce ! As they entered the village, all was quiet; and a light was seen in one of the windows of the upper chambers of the “Jolly Butchers”—indicative of the watch being kept over the shrouded corpse of its late master.

It had been purposed to deposit Crankum's body here for the coroner's inquest, but the sad

state of the house suggested its deposition at the “Hole-in-Wall” public-house. The church clock struck two as Mr. Ruffham reached his home; when “Sweet Marjoram” never before pricked up his ears, rolled his eyes, and neighed so cheerily, as when he *then* heard the sound of the oats in the sieve.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VILLAGE CHURCH AND CHURCH-YARD. A
VOICE FROM THE PULPIT.

AFTER the excitement of the three preceding chapters, the reader may be disposed to take a stroll to the church and church-yard, especially as it is Sunday—and be one of the hearers of the afternoon sermon, preached by Mr. Thomson, the Curate. “Hush’d is the mower’s scythe,” are the first words of the late Mr. Graham’s beautiful poem upon the Sabbath. It is now the month of December and not of July; and the “mower’s scythe” is suspended in the barn, or the outhouse, for a good six months’ repose; but horses and carts are at rest; and all, save public-houses, is closed upon the public foot and public curiosity. The fields have put on their vestments of virgin snow; the foot-paths are encrusted with ice; the icicles, as they are in part thawed or melted from the branches of the trees, and the eaves of the thatched roofs, tinkle, as they fall upon the indurated footpath.

The sun is in full splendour above, but all is darkness in *two* tenements below.

Yet another word before we prepare to ascend the hillock upon which the church stands. At the dawn of day (on the morning immediately following that of the “MIDNIGHT BATTU”) the whole village was stirring and abroad before the door of the “Hole in the Wall.” Mrs. Thimbleton seemed to take the lead, as usual; heightening her emphasis as she raised her voice upon the enormity of the offence for which Crankum had so justly merited his death. Mrs. Partridge and Mrs. Spark, with sundry other females, readily joined in this conclusion—and from one house of woe they went to the other, “the Jolly Butchers”—but in the latter, indulging in strains of sympathy with the widow Smithers. As for the end of her husband the least said the better; but *she* had done nothing to deprive her of the compassion of her neighbours—and she should always have *hers*.

“And *ours* too,” replied her companions—who by this time were joined by almost all those worthies whom we have described in a preceding chapter.*

The Coroner’s inquest upon Crankum’s body terminated by a verdict of “Accidental Death,” and upon Smithers “Died by the visitation of God.” There was a good deal of carping and controversy

* Page 66.

respecting the propriety of both verdicts. The bodies were buried on the Saturday evening.

We are now within the church-yard, and the chimes are in full play for the service about to commence within half an hour. The tomb-stones are numerous, and the inscriptions upon some would call forth the wrath of the critic, and upon others disturb the equanimity of the pious; but there is one flat, coarsely sculptured, slab, within three paces of the porch, which deserves an especial notice—if it be only on account of the TALE which belongs to the history of the deceased. A rude intertwining cord is cut upon the outer edge—as a frame-work round the inscription—which simply purports that the body of the deceased lies below. The curious spectator inquires what is meant by the *intertwisted* cord? The sexton tells him—and tells him TRULY—that, the deceased some hundred years ago had been a gardener in the service of a gentleman residing within the town of * * * : that, on retiring to dinner, as was his custom, to “the Bull” public-house there, at one o’clock, a sheriff’s officer, in the service of a Mr. Bradshaw the under sheriff, betook himself there in the hope of securing an individual against whom a writ was issued. On the entrance of that individual, the officer of justice proceeded to the execution of his duty. The man resisted stoutly; and those about seemed to assist in, or to

be anxious for, his escape from the grasp of the officer. The gardener was sitting quietly at his meal, having on his usual apron, with a leathern open pocket in the front of it. Within the pocket was his ordinary *gardening knife*. Aggravated by the overwhelming strength of the officer, the man, seeing the knife in the gardener's pocket, seized it, and plunged it into the officer's belly up to the hilt. He quickly drew it out, and replaced it, smoking with human blood, in the pocket of the gardener.

The man escaped. The officer fell, and died that same night upon the premises. The gardener was searched ; the bloody knife was found upon him ; no doubt could be entertained of his guilt ; he was tried and sentenced to be hung—and *hung* he was accordingly. One day, an idiot—who has always a sort of privileged curiosity to go where he pleases—on peering through the window of a low room, thought he saw the gardener, or his ghost, sitting by the side of the fire. This was about three weeks after he was hung. The idiot sent forth the note of discovery far and wide ; a search was made, and the gardener was found in the cellar of the house where the idiot had discovered him : his friends, overjoyed with having succeeded in cutting him down from the gallows, before the vital spark had become extinct, were so indiscreet

as to allow a premature exposure of his person. He was seized, tried a second time, and executed outright for the supposed murder. His relations and friends buried him, without any service performed over the lifeless body—and placed upon his grave the *very slab* of which we are speaking.

Some forty years afterwards, a man residing near* * *, and being at the point of death, sent for the clergyman of the place; and telling him that he could not die comfortably in his bed without making a certain disclosure, confessed that HE had been the MURDERER of the sheriff's officer!—that HE had contrived to return the gardener's knife all reeking with blood, into the pocket, and had escaped by favour of the darkness of the night. On the clergyman's asking him “how he could allow an innocent man to suffer?” he replied, “how could the *Law* allow it?” and to the question “why he allowed such a length of time to elapse before he made the disclosure,” he answered, “the devil had only *that morning* urged him to it—on condition of his living upon good terms of fellowship with him hereafter!”

But the chimes are down, and the “tolling in” bell has nearly fallen. Let us hasten to “go into his courts with praise, and come before his presence with a song.” Let us fall down lowly and reverently at the footstool of the Great Jehovah. Is

there a want which we desire to have satisfied ? Is there a wish to express—a prayer to prefer—a happiness to seek—that we find *not* expressed or pointed out in the incomparable Liturgy of the Established Protestant Church of this country ? Where is the wretchedness which the sufferer is not therein instructed properly to endure ? Where is the hope, “laid up in Heaven,” as well as upon earth, which, if cherished in an innocent bosom, may not in such a service be confidently entertained ? The pride of wealth is laid low ; the insolence of earthly power is repressed ; the taunt of scorn is thrown back upon the scorner ; the derision of folly is despised ; sickness is comforted ; love is strengthened ; and death disarmed of its sting in that “*Form of Prayer*,” which the Rev. Mr. Thomson has just commenced to read from his desk.

For a morning service, not followed by a sermon, the attendance was more than usually numerous. Major Dacre, the Squire, the Magistrate, and of course the ladies at Thornborough Abbey and Hasleby Park, were in their several pews. Mrs. Thimbleton dropped a consecutive series of courtesies as they all passed her in their ingress and egress. She never before seemed to carry so brave a front. Every look of the “grandees” was construed into the imparting of important intelligence to her, re-

specting the two deceased ; and the whisper was both general and loud that there would be a great congregation in the afternoon, as it was the intention of the Vicar to preach a particular sermon connected with recent events. On returning home, Mrs. Thimbleton exchanged civilities with Mrs. Spark, who was accompanied by her “godly friend—” invited to renew his acquaintance with the “fare of the primitive Christians.”*

The monuments within the church are few, and only one that is ancient, which may be pushed up to the reign of Edward III. The nose is broken, and the recumbent figure is dismembered of its hands. If I mistake not, it may be seen in that delightful, as well as instructive work, “*Blore's Monumental Remains*,” which, to the eternal disgrace of the age has been allowed to drop for want of patronage. Instead of the countless somniferous papers, or essays, which the good-nature or the perverse nature of the Society of Antiquaries is at the cost of publishing, would not that Society have acted both wisely and munificently if it had taken up and perpetuated these “*Remains*,” while the originals, in the course of time, must crumble to dust ? But who shall look for TASTE in a “body corporate ?”

We are again nearing the porch, and preparing for Sabbath-worship. The afternoon proving very

* See page 79.

fine, it was surprising to observe how many of the inhabitants, of all classes, were in motion towards the church. Scrimes and Tibbets were putting their heads together for a “solemn anthem” on the occasion ; but Roger Payne and Mrs. Tucker thought that the less sung, upon this occasion, the better.

The establishments at Thornborough Abbey, Hasleby Park, and Dacre Hall were all present, with the exception of the lowest menials. Mrs. Thorpe was seated in due front of the preacher, with her glittering silver spectacles across her nose, and her memorandum-book opened, in which to insert the *text*. Every eye was directed to the pulpit, and every ear turned in that direction to catch the monitory sounds that fell from it, when the Vicar commenced his discourse from the following text : Psalm ix., 16 :—*The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.*” Considering the character of the individual, whose violent death had chiefly instigated this address, the text was perhaps a happy one. The very delivery of it caused a deep silence ; but on casting an eye over the congregation, it was manifest that neither Mr. Silver-top, nor his clerk, nor Spark, the blacksmith, were present. Mr. Thorpe, the Major’s venerable butler, seemed to make it a particular point, during the earlier part of the service, to observe and note down

those who were *absent*—wherfrom he drew very significant conclusions.

The discourse of the preacher hardly exceeded twenty minutes; but there was a sort of pregnant brevity throughout the whole which convinced you that every possible point which could be touched upon, was concentrated and treated with signal propriety and effect. “I want the meanest of those now hearing me,” said Mr. Markham, “to be especially convinced that there is no situation in life, however humble, where the precious fruits of *virtue* and *industry* may not be gathered in abundance, to cheer the heart of the possessor, and to make the slothful and the envious to gnash their teeth with shame. Nor, on the other hand, must it be concealed that mischief the most direful may ensue from a source the most obscure and contemptible.

“Remember the character of *that man* who yesterday was first lowered into the grave near the spot whence I am now addressing you. How base in origin, how skulking in all his habits, how desperate and thoroughly wicked in his final views! He was one of those wretched beings, whose deeds being dark, make a friend of the *night* as they lack the courage to face the *day*; and associating with other spirits, more wicked than themselves, spread havoc and destruction wherever they go! so that their ‘last state is worse than the first.’

By a merciful interposition of Divine Providence, the mischief intended for others ‘fell upon the head of the deceased ; and he became as the carrion and dung of the earth, without even its fertilizing quality. Who mourns over the grave of the murderer ? Who does not shudder at the plotter of perfidious mischief ? Be present when that man goes home and cowers over his fire-side. The very crackles of the sparks emitted from the stolen fuel frighten him. He hears a warning voice in every hollow murmur of the wind. He sees an overshadowing form, as not of this world, in every branch of the tree that bends across his window from the fury of the blast. Like the upturned mire of the ocean, the wicked can have no rest.

“ But mark, my friends, the *end* of the unrighteous man : how in a moment he dies, and is forgotten. No chaplets are woven for his tomb :—no mingling sobs of intense heart-consuming grief accompany the body as it is let down into the deep and dark grave. You cannot have forgotten—you never will forget—the occurrences of yesterday : bearing especially in mind the shuddering conflict exhibited between the two companions of the deceased ; how they were at once present and absent ; —in person, standing by the grave side,—in spirit, calling upon the hills to hide and the mountains to overwhelm them. Pale, trembling, and ghastly,

what brought them to the spot? *Conscience*. What paralysed them when present, so that a little child might have precipitated them below? *Conscience*. This is the sulphur and flame that is forever burning within wicked breasts. You cannot extinguish it. It is a cauterising tormentor which gets up and lies down with you, and you can no more fly from *it* than from your own *shadow*.

" But there is yet another topic connected with the dead, who were interred yesterday, upon which I deem it my duty to make an observation or two; even though it may be at the expense of inflicting a sad wound upon more than one sympathizing bosom. The duty of the preacher is, to do good on the largest possible scale. He is not an instrument for one, but for many. Of all species of death, that inflicted by our own *hands*, upon our own *constitutions*, is, perhaps, the most lamentable. A protracted lingering state of bodily and mental debility is sufficiently wretched to view, and sufficiently wretched to experience. You are cutting in twain the hearts of others as well as your own; for they see you gradually sinking—the slave of habitual drunkenness, or the victim of habitual debauchery. A brute beast can at no time present so deplorable a spectacle. And then, when one thinks of *hereafter*—of a day of reckoning and account—of standing up before a 'most just judge,' bowing

the heavens as he comes down to pass judgment,—the dispenser of eternal happiness or eternal misery—the secret, sure, intimation that you will be herded with the goats on the left side—what, what, I ask you, must be the sensations, and the hopeless state of despondency, of the individual so situated ? My young friends, and my old friends—my beloved Christian brethren—may the recent events, which have called forth these reflections, form matter for your serious meditation ! May they teach you the charm and the worth of innocence : the misery and degradation arising from intemperance and vice.

“ Turn we from such cheerless, if not shuddering, topics, and let us not leave this hallowed place without thinking of, and conversing with, the good, and the amiable, and the exemplary ; characters who warm, as heaven’s own sunshine, the poor man’s cottage, by their presence and their gifts. These are about you in this remote village, wherever you go ; indeed, they are in greater abundance here than in most spots at such a distance from the metropolis. Whatever be the deserts and the virtues of such characters, rest assured that their chief hope, wish, and boast is, to live in the *hearts* of the industrious and grateful poor. No sounds to them so sweet as the notes of thankfulness—no support so strong as that of active arms set in motion by grateful hearts. A severe, and, perhaps, long winter is before us, and

many of you will probably be in a state of dependence, if not penury. Be not ashamed to make it known, when you are conscious that it has not been the result of *idleness* and *intemperance*. You must not compromise with these baneful qualities, but tear them at once, as you would the coiled snake, from your inmost bosom. God places us all precisely in the condition which we occupy ; and our uniform endeavour—high and low, rich and poor—should be, to fill that situation WELL : the consequences rest with the Supreme Disposer of all things.”

Here Mr. Markham concluded his discourse ; which, from beginning to end, was heard with a silence that might have caused an echo to the dropping of a pin. The congregation, giving way to their feelings, betrayed evident marks of satisfaction. There were tears in some eyes, and gracious quiet smiles upon many faces. The good man of the pulpit was perfectly surrounded by his congratulatory friends, as he made his way to the vestry.

Among these, the figure and voice of Dr. Glossop were particularly distinguishable. “ My dear Mr. Vicar,” said that high-church champion of Oxford divinity, “ we could not have managed the subject better in the pulpit of *St. Mary’s*.”

“ At any rate, Doctor, with more eloquence and learning.” Here the Vicar’s reply was cut short by

the Major's asking, what "*learning* had to do in a matter of this kind?"

Close to the vestry door, Mr. Markham found, to his infinite astonishment, Jobson and Stubbings, the comrades of the deceased Crankum, apparently choked with the agonies of a reproving conscience. They had heard every syllable of the discourse, and it was said that Jobson at one moment had been so affected as to have nearly rushed out of the church. At this critical juncture, Mrs. Thimbleton, entering the vestry, dropped a profound curtsey. "Such a discourse!—Oh! Mr. Markham, you put my heart all in a flutter. What joy to find that none of your thorns stuck here," pointing to her breast. On turning round, and seeing Stubbings and Jobson, the good woman was so shocked as to scream out,—"the wretches!—they broke into my house last night, and stole nearly all my golden pippins!"

Apart from the rest, and still lingering in her secluded pew, stood the *Widow* of the deceased Mr. Smithers. She had put on the best mourning which her limited wardrobe could supply; and as Mr. Markham quitted the vestry, she dropped a gentle curtsey, and covered her eyes with her handkerchief. "Oh! Sir, you have trod a little too hard upon my poor husband's grave;—but you are a good and a kind gentleman, and God's blessed will

be done!" Mr. Markham extended his arm, and quietly pressing the trembling hand of the widow, told her "to take courage, and not to be disquieted or distressed; that she had done *her* duty, and he hoped he had done *his*. Let us see you at the vicarage to-morrow morning, good Mrs. Smithers. Keep up a brave heart, and God bless you."

Meanwhile Reginald Cranmer, Charles Ponton, and Nicholas Tyndale, were gossiping in the church porch, waiting the egress of the *Magnates*; and there they found Mr. Thorpe, the butler, giving his deliberate opinion, to about half a dozen bystanders, upon the prominent points of the Vicar's discourse. "The main comfort which I felt, and ever shall feel," observed that sagacious critic, "was, and will be, that I never mind how high the wind blows, and how darkly the boughs bend across the window of my bed-room, in a stormy night. No, indeed, all is calm, because all is right, here:" added he, giving his breast a good hearty slap. "But how comes it to pass that Sir Joseph and my Lady Proudfoot were not present? To be sure, my wife observed to me this morning, that my lady's head maid had told her, that her mistress disliked *funeral sermons* above all things, they were so extremely disagreeable."

"But extremely *edifying*," observed Mr. Scrimes, the parish-clerk, who had, by this time, joined the

critical conclave. The parties then retired to their respective homes ; and never was there a Sunday evening, of which the general village gossip assumed so serious a complexion. Never did the honest occupier of the cottage feel greater delight than, when stirring his fire, and opening his Bible, he read and meditated, and meditated and read, upon the solemn services of the past day—from which he gathered that the grave of the wicked was as a bed of feverish restlessness, while that of the good was as one of comforting repose. The former were to rise only to moan in utter darkness; the latter, to shine for ever and ever as the stars in the firmament of heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SABBATH EVENING AT THORNBURY ABBEY.

WHILE the majority of the villagers were enjoying the rational and even edifying tranquillity of the Sabbath, there might possibly have been an exception to the general rule in the interior of the mansion of Mr. and Mrs. Spark.* It has been just observed that Mrs. Thimbleton and Mrs. Spark interchanged salutations in seeking their several homes, on the conclusion of the morning service; and that the latter was about to be *blest*, as usual, with the soul-searching society of her Sunday monitor and companion, * * *, who “gave utterance to the word,” in an obscure chapel, nigh unto the residence of the former. The happy pair were in the act of demolishing meat and vegetables, when, a thing most unusual, the bed-room bell of Mr. Spark was heard to ring. The maid and Mrs. Spark rushed spontaneously to respond to it, when the master of the house — not so entirely “*somno*

* See page 75.

vinoque sepultus" as was his wont—asked "whose man's voice he heard below?"

"'Tis the voice of the godly man," replied the servant, in the very simplicity of her heart.

"The *ungodly* man, goose, you mean," half-snorted and growled forth Mr. Spark; "bid him pack up his alls, and leave my house, instantly; and bring up my shaving water."

Mrs. Spark made her appearance, and her husband repeated the question.

"My dear, 'tis a pious wayfaring man, and you would not grudge such a man a small portion of "the fare of the primitive Christians."

"Primitive fiddlesticks! get you gone—and Sally, do as I command you."

Mrs. Spark knew the full value of prompt obedience; and making the most of her feet and her time, she urged the godly guest to dispatch his dinner with all convenient speed, while she would "just run and get him a glass of their last and best brewed to comfort his fainting spirit." Her husband, who never cared whether his beard was off or on, and who was seized with an unusual and irresistible fit of curiosity, came down, a scarcely civilized Caliban, and entered the parlour, as his wife in the cellar was seeming to chide the liquor for not running more quickly into the jug. She was quite unconscious of the husband's descent. Spark rather "looked"

than sighed “unutterable things,” as his fierce eye met the abashed looks of Mr. Tramp, the hawker and pedlar, in the disguised garb of a clergyman, with the shovel hat topping the suspended great-coat. In glided Mrs. Spark with the jug of ale, her hand trembling, and the cup well nigh falling upon the floor...

“So, so—your health, Gaffer Tramp,” roared the inhuman master of the house, and quaffed off the liquor at ‘one fell swoop.’

The astonished wife opened both mouth and eyes; but the godly man, well pleased perhaps in his heart not to have received the contents of the jug in his face, was making a rapid movement for departure—when Spark, on finishing the liquor, put his hand upon two homely-bound volumes, lying on the table by the side of the mutton and artichokes, and asked, “if *these* were to form the *second* course for the dinner?”

“Gross sensualist!” replied Mrs. Spark, “what you are touching is *spiritual food*. Open and read, for thou canst if it please thee.”

“Not I,” replied the appeased husband; “but as I am now down, I may as well help you to dispatch the bodily food. Don’t be confused—sit down—Mr. Tramp, you and my mistress will, in the mean time, partake of your *spiritual sustenance*.”

The sensual man was as good as his word ; for down he sat, and the solid contents of the mutton gradually diminished, while he roared for another jug of ale : his wife and her guest looking at each other, and lifting up their eyes and hands mechanically. “ Why, Master Tramp, do you hawk these wares (pointing to the books) about on a *Sunday*? ”

“ Mr. Spark, I hope no offence, but I wish to do my duty on *every* day in the week.”

“ And so you *do*, ” rejoined Mrs. Spark, fixing her eyes firmly and sparklingly upon her guest, “ in the strict and best sense of the word. Here are, ” said she, next addressing her husband, and reading the title of the first volume, “ ‘ *Pills to purge Pride*. ’ These would do *you* no harm to take, Mr. Spark ; and here (opening the second volume) is ‘ *a Salve for a sore Conscience*. ’ ”

“ Stick that on your *own* back, wife, ” bitterly replied the galled husband. “ Away with such rubbish. No pills for me—except ‘ *Pills to purge Melancholy*. ’ * What ho ! tell the girl to draw me a third jug of our ‘ last and best brewed, ’ Mrs. Spark.” It was evident that the master of the

* It could scarcely have entered the pericranium of Mr. Spark to know that these words are the title of a set of coarse, but popular, ballads, partly written, and published, by *Tom Durfey*, the crack song-writer in the reign of Queen Anne and George I.

house was in the high road to brutal intoxication ; yet the visitor, very sensibly sitting at the edge of the table, contrived to introduce a little more provender into his stomach—while Mrs. Spark sat doggedly silent in front of the fire, almost turning her back upon her husband. Mr. Spark's utterance became more and more indistinct, while his hiccoughs increased in succession and noise.

On making an effort to rise towards the door, Mr. Tramp gave his ready assistance, and urged both the importance and necessity of “reclining upon his couch”—meaning, thereby, his bed. Spark took him at his word, and staggered to a tumble-down sofa, at the further end of the room ;—where

“ Stretch'd at length the lubber-fiend”

snored through the remaining portion of the day; to the infinite mortification of the spiritual hawker and pedlar, who had counted upon a soft hour or two of sweet converse with his amiable pupil and hostess. Still the unctuous teacher never lost sight of “the fare of the primitive Christians,” till, satisfied with having fully fortified “the inner man,” he rose, resumed his upper tunic and Jeroboam,* and breathed a gentle adieu. Mrs. Spark had scarcely strength to return it ; when, on his departure, she placed the “pills” and the “salve” upon the shelf,

* See page 79.

and looking at her insensible husband, and uttering, most emphatically the word—"wretch!" she slammed the door, and retired to her kitchen.

From such a picture of mental darkness and degradation, let us direct our steps in another quarter, and to a wholly different object; as if from night to the morning sun, or from Tartarus to

..... amœna vireta
Fortunatorum nemorum, sedesque beatas.

It is in the direction of *Thornborough Abbey* whither I call upon the reader to accompany me. It is to a contemplation of rational piety, in which fanaticism forms no ingredient; to the moral obligations imposed, or rather enjoyed, by the sacredness of the Sabbath, not divested of harmless recreation on the one hand, or of strict propriety and spiritual consolation on the other; from which it may be gathered that prosperous circumstances do not *necessarily* preclude an inattention to sabbatical duties.

A word or two more, by way of preliminary remark. There is no one thing, or topic, upon which the good people of England differ, as well as talk, so much, as that upon the proper observance of the Sabbath-day. In an unfortunate moment, as it strikes the author of these pages, two distinguished churchmen tried their pens upon this sub-

ject ; in which their learning and their ingenuity were tasked to their limits, to prove that all the abstaining parts, or prohibitions, involved in the practical consideration of the matter, referred more exclusively to the *Jewish*, than to the *Christian*, Sabbath ; so as, in the end, almost to merge the *seventh* into the common week days ! In fact, that every *spiritual* pursuit, or exercise, was a matter purely *voluntary* ; the upshot of which argument would be, that churches might be shut, and shops opened, on that day ; that greasy smock-frocks would not be deserving of being anathematized ; that the ox might yet be yoked to the plough, and the carman cracking his whip by the side of the team. The result of all this is, or would be, that decency, quiet, order, discipline, well-regulated thoughts, and a worship God-ward, must, in due course of time, cease to have place amongst us.

It is very well to argue in this way as an ingenious specimen of ratiocination, and when judges might be as well pagans as christians ; but to talk, or propound the subject, thus, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-nine, is to dispossess ourselves alike of common sense and common experience ; and to prepare ourselves for the Babel-clamour of week-days to the very end of our existence. There would be no time, because no inducement, to think of heaven ; and the mind

would become as coarse as the dress in its texture.

On the other hand, a learned bishop put forth a stringent pamphlet upon the same subject, but tied the cord of his argument a little too tightly. With him, there should be scarcely *locomotion* on the Sabbath-day : no boats upon the river : no coaches upon the road : no tea-gardens : no strolling in the dewy meads, and gathering butter-cups—but pent up, in prayer, penance, or psalmody, the sun was to rise and to set upon human beings as if all social impulses had been absorbed in religious exercises. Now the mischief—or the thing absolutely to be deplored—in this case, is, the taking of an *extreme* view of the subject-matter : the being indifferent on the one hand, and the being too searching on the other, to “mark what is done amiss.” Where then shall we find the ‘ happy or golden mean’—upon this ‘ all-engrossing subject ?’ .

Let us see if something approaching it may not be found at Thornborough Abbey. Why a dinner should be badly drest, or why hot viands are profane, on the Sunday, seems not to be very intelligible ; and therefore the reader is hereby put into possession of the important fact, that a select and happy circle graced the dining-table of Mrs. Cranmer on the afternoon immediately following

the Vicar's discourse. Major Dacre, Mr. Clutterbuck, Charles Ponton (for obvious reasons), and both the Vicar and Curate with their respective ladies, were the visitors. Reginald Cranmer had got his pen in his hand, to request his friend Charles Ponton to bring the Oxford champion with him ; but the Major insisted on the contrary. The terror of his *Phlosboterotontodon* battering-ram seemed yet to be fresh in all their remembrances. At six o'clock, the party were occupied with a fare very different it must be confessed to that of "the primitive christians." At the earnest request of the lady of the house, not the slightest mention of, or allusion to, the topics handled in the vicar's discourse, were introduced during the dinner. "I remember," said Mrs. Cranmer, "once dining with a party, where burglary and an attempt at murder ensued on the very evening of the party—in consequence of a most indiscreet disclosure made by one of the guests."

"A *woman*, I wager?" said the Major to his sister.

"Verily, brother, it happened to be a *man*—and one almost as *young* as yourself!"

"I deserve this saucy reply at your hands, my dear Julia :"—and in two moments the Major was sitting by her right hand at the dinner-table. Mr. Clutterbuck graced her left.

At the bottom sat Reginald, with the vicar's lady on one side, and that of the curate on the other. Julia Cranmer took her chair next to Mr. Clutterbuck; and Marianne opposite, next to the Major; with young Ponton, necessarily, by her side. This placed the vicar and the curate in the perilous predicament of sitting next to their wives. Many awkward experiments were made to avert this fearful collision; "which," said the Major, in a *sotto voce*, but looking flushed at the same time, to his sister, "might have been all avoided, if you had invited *Mrs. Danvers* to be of the party!"

"My dear brother, she declined coming from Woodbine Lodge till the *evening*."

This intelligence smoothed down every irritable bristle in a moment—and Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Thomson were each challenged in turn by the Major. Mr. Clutterbuck was not less attentive to Julia Cranmer than to her mother: quietly intimating to each—in spite of the prohibition of the latter—the perfect delight and satisfaction they had all felt at the vicar's discourse. Both parent and daughter gave their full assent; but Mrs. Cranmer significantly crossed her lips with her forefinger—and the gentleman bowed obedience. It was a plain, rational, well-regulated repast: the gentlemen all observing a quiet tone in their con-

versation, very unlike that which was manifested on a preceding day at Hasleby Park. About three-quarters of an hour after the vicar had given his blessing, on its conclusion, the ladies retired to the drawing-room. The gentlemen then agreed to draw close their files, and more or less to turn to the fire by removing a leaf out of the table.

Reginald and Charles now got into close gossip together ; but on the resumption of the subject of the sermon, they declared, warmly and spontaneously, that the parishioners were deeply indebted to their pastor.

“ I hope he will *print* it ? ” said the curate.

“ Not while his name is Henry Markham,” replied the preacher.

“ We will put it to the vote,” exclaimed the Major ; — “ carried unanimously. I must have fifty copies.”

“ And I ten,” said Mr. Clutterbuck.

“ And I another ten,” said Charles Ponton.

“ Ten for my mother, and ten for her son,” said Reginald.

“ Gentlemen, gentlemen, this is distressing to me,” exclaimed the vicar. — “ If you think the sermon likely to do good by public distribution, it shall be printed at my exclusive cost ; and you may all have gratuitously as many copies as you please — and here is my good-for-nothing curate,

Mr. Thomson, who shall have a *hundred copies* at his disposal. I will hear of this subject upon no other conditions."

At first there was the look of mute astonishment ; then the movement of the lips, and then the shout of the tongue—in simultaneous expressions of admiration and thankfulness : the curate declaring, with a sort of choked utterance, that " his rector was always *treating him in this way!*"

Every countenance, mantling with the sweet indescribable expression of Christian philanthropy, was turned towards Mr. Markham ; and " God bless you, my dear sir," accompanied the gently bending head, and raised arm—with the glass filled to the brim at its extremity. It were impossible for hearts to be more in unison with well disposed minds, than at this moment were those of this party of six gentlemen, whose names are already before the reader. The lips of Mr. Clutterbuck were in *perfect drawing* to their very extremities ; and the Major was evidently impatient for an intellectual *sally* of some sort.

" Do pray tell me, my dear sir—" observed he to Mr. Markham, " as this is a day well fitting the subject—are we for ever to give up all hopes of a *revision* of our incomparable liturgy ?"

" If," replied the vicar, " it be '*incomparable*,' where is the necessity of a *revision*? "

"I crave pardon, the word was used by me in too absolute a sense. I meant incomparable, relatively to that of other rituals with which it may be compared. But the liturgy of England may surely yet be revised to *advantage*? It may still more closely approach *perfection*."

"You are right," rejoined the magistrate, "you are right, my worthy neighbour. I have long seen with deep and sincere regret, that the bishops or archdeacons, whoever it may be to whom such an office may be delegated, are not only in the *rear*, but seem anxious to *continue* in the rear, of the march of improvement which is now in progress on all sides. Why will the CHURCH OF ENGLAND be always playing the *second* fiddle when the *first* is within her grasp? Why not concede with a good face at first—rather than be crammed and jammed into measures which cause her to make wry faces on compulsion? In the matter of *national education* Lancaster was allowed to occupy the *foreground* and then, when national education was thought to be of some importance, what a fuss was made in pushing forward Dr. Bell?—a man who had scarcely more than the negative merit of adopting *here* what his own eyes saw previously adopted in a *foreign* country. Mouths could not be opened too widely in expressions of commendation of this wary Scot—who should seem to have

been invested with something like a preternatural halo of wisdom and glory. A more tiresome and capricious man—even in the testamentary disposition of his property—never existed. Then as to *another* second fiddle which the Church of England chose to play, in regard to a weekly Journal. After the *Penny Magazine* had done great good, by an unprecedented circulation, out came their *Saturday Magazine*—ably conducted; and of unquestionable principles—but the sounds of the *first* fiddle had got possession of the public ear, and it was, and yet is, a hard fight to make a *tenor* more popular than a *treble*."

"Gently—gently—my good Mr. Clutterbuck," observed the curate, "you are getting on too fast. It is easy to indulge in general expressions of indiscriminate censure; but when you direct them to such a body as the CHURCH, I feel persuaded that you will regulate your soundings carefully before you pronounce the vessel to have struck upon a rock. Of all professions, that of our own, as involving the most important of earthly interests requires to be the most anxiously and dispassionately protected. A natural philosopher lectures upon light or heat to-day, upon what data; or from what experiments, he pleases; but to-morrow it is no reproach to him if he draws conclusions in direct opposition to those of the preceding day; because

perhaps the elements are perpetually shifting upon which his hypothesis is built. You cannot, or you ought not to be, thus shifting or excursive upon those topics which involve in their anxious consideration the great truths of *Christianity*, and the eternal interests of another world. Name more tangibly the topics to which your objections are pointed."

"Readily, Mr. Thomson and I do so the more heartily, as, previously concurring in your general positions, first, that the Church is not to be approached as a *toy*, to be converted into what shape or form a fretful child may require ; and secondly, that the enormous interest at stake, in the whole regulation of articles, creeds, and forms of public prayer, demands the most cautious as well as steady hand in the operation to be performed for their correction or cure. But I must also smooth my way with one or two general propositions like your own. I consider doctrine and ceremony to be two things essentially different. You and I may subscribe to the same *doctrine*, but we may differ widely in the *mode* or form of its inculcation upon others. The stubborn Scot wo'n't bend his knee in prayer to God : and yet he may adore as zealously and as sincerely as we do, when, on our bended knees, the Church of England enjoins us to offer up our orisons to our Maker, through a common intercessor. Again : the liturgy of our Church

being but a thing of human invention, as to its component parts, these parts *themselves* necessarily partake of human fallibility. They cannot be supposed to come with the impress of *perfectability*, at once, from the mint where they were coined, any more than your lecturer upon light or heat may affirm that the experiments of to-day will render all future experiments superfluous?"

"Does Mr. Clutterbuck," observed the vicar, "mean to confine his arguments, or observations, to our Book of Common Prayer as a *whole*? or to *parts* of it? Would he have, from beginning to end, a new arrangement of the same materials, or does he think that much or little of these materials may be advantageously *corrected*, or *omitted*?"

"If I may presume to interpose, or interrupt," said Reginald Cranmer, "it strikes me that the *spirit*, or scope of the argument will be just the same, whether Mr. Clutterbuck object to the arrangement of the *whole*, or to the composition of *parts*?"

"Precisely so," replied Mr. Clutterbuck.

"Let us go then, at once, *in medias res*"—remarked the major; "but I fear we are about to embark upon a boundless ocean, and (looking at his watch) the ladies will be expecting us within the hour." It may be suspected that this observation was not *quite* a disinterested one.

“ Will Mr. Clutterbuck endure, if not a second *sermon*, at least something like a *lecture*, on the same Sabbath-day? And may I presume to hold the scales of the argument with so even a hand, that my worthy curate on the one side, and the not less worthy magistrate on the other, may acquit me of even the *semblance* of partiality? At any rate, will they allow me to state my *own* opinion with frankness, so as probably, in the end, to meet something like their respective views upon the subject?” The parties bowed assent, and the Vicar continued thus:—“ Major Dacre shall find the ‘ocean’ of discussion neither boundless nor stormy. If we feel so disposed, we may keep in smooth water from one end of it to the other. No man in his senses prefers the chopping waves of the Bay of Biscay to the compressed waters of the Mediterranean. But for this *in medias res* of the Major. The publication of such a work as our Common Prayer Book must necessarily at first have been something like an *experimentum crucis*. On the demolition of Papacy as the established religion of the country, you could not at first suit all tastes and satisfy all converts. The very importance of the thing, from the awful interests involved in its issue, necessarily produced differences and discrepancies. You had *Primers* and *Manuals*, and little isolated fragments or scraps of piety, till, in 1549, out came the

parent volume of our Book of Common Prayer, in a folio form ; and yet, *thrice* in the same year, were there *amended* editions of parts or of the whole ;* some copies, indeed, having the date of 1548—which was, in fact, that of King Harry the Eighth's *Primer*. Next, you had the edition of 1552 ; afterwards, that of 1569 ; then, that in the reign of James I., when our present authorized text of the Bible was published under the authority of that sapient monarch ; and, lastly, you had the Prayer Book of 1661, which is, in fact, the *present* text, in daily use. So that Mr. Clutterbuck will, at least, observe a confirmation of his position, that “things *human* require human AMENDMENT.”

“I beg it distinctly to be understood,” resumed the magistrate, evidently gratified by what had just fallen from the vicar, “that there is no man

* The secret history of the publication of the first authorized *Form of Public Prayer*, is, perhaps, yet a puzzle to biblical antiquarians. There should seem to have been an edition in March, in May, and in June ; and there are even discrepancies in the text of the impression of the *same month*. In an unbound state, the original price of this book was half-a-crown ; when “bound in paste, or in boards covered with calf leather,” the price was an additional six-pence. Parts of this parent text were printed the same year, 1549, by Owen, a provincial printer at Worcester, Ipswich, and Shrewsbury, in a quarto form ; but he who chooses to travel over hill and down dale, in this fruitful country, may consult the recent edition of our *Typographical Antiquities*, vol. iii. p. 403, &c.

breathing who holds in higher respect, and feels a deeper gratitude towards the *Liturgy of the Church of England*, than the individual who is now addressing you ; and that I will not allow even the language of Jeremy Taylor* to go beyond my own in expressions of unbounded admiration for the piety of its sentiments, and the purity of its language—”

(“*Opus paenè divinum !*” shouted the Major, parenthetically.)

“ But, surely, I may be allowed to ask what has occurred since the period of its *first* promulgation, to render further alterations *not necessary* ?”

“ Nay,” replied Mr. Thomson, “ I enter my protest against that mode of argument, which, if not running somewhat in a circle, is at least begging the question. It is for *you*, Mr. Clutterbuck, to show what *has* occurred since 1661, to render a revision absolutely *necessary*.”

“ I must not be tripped up in this manner, my

* The Major must allude to the preface in the *Collection of Offices on Forms of Prayer*, 1658, octavo. It is, indeed, among the most successful as well as magnificent outbreaks of the sublime fancy of its gifted author ; and it is well for the ensuing extract that it is not placed in *juxta* position with it :—“ Stripped of the mummery of idle forms, and communicating directly with the heart, our RATIONALE of PUBLIC PRAYERS has been seldom criticized (even by the bitterest of its assailants) without respect, or meditated upon without advantage.”—LIBRARY COMPANION.

worthy sir," answered Mr. Clutterbuck, slightly crimsoned in the countenance ; " for you now bring me precisely to the points upon which, with deference, I would ask the opinions of my two 'reverend masters' present. I come now, then, to the component parts. By this time, we got the two services of *Gunpowder Treason* and the *Restoration* introduced ; services, purely and decidedly *political* ; services, which form neither 'part nor parcel' of devotion in our intercourse with our Maker and Redeemer. I wish, indeed, that, as Archbishop Tillotson said of the Athanasian Creed—"

" For mercy's sake," interrupted the Major, " touch not upon that point in our coasting voyage. We shall be sure to get into a tempest, or be swamped on a quicksand."

The sound of the wheels of Mrs. Danver's carriage arriving was thought to have produced this ungracious remark ; but Mr. Clutterbuck continued : " I wish we were well rid of them ; and as a confirmation of their absurdity, here comes William the Third over to England on Gunpowder Treason day ; and two services, as opposite as light is from darkness, are commanded to be observed on the self-same day. Now, I ask, does anybody observe *either* of these services ? Does anybody go expressly to church on these days ? In short, they are as withered sticks in a bundle of

'budding rods.' The character of the Second Charles, who was a protestant only in lip, and a papist at heart (for he died in the latter persuasion) is so thoroughly detestable, that I wonder the excellent prelates of his time could —”

“ You forget,” remarked Mr. Thomson, “ it is not the man, but the *Restoration of Monarchy*, through his ascending the throne, that makes *that* service acceptable to good churchmen. What say you to the service respecting the Martyrology of his Father?”

“ I would away with it, on every account. When men come into a place of worship to ‘worship their maker in sincerity and truth,’ let the manuals of their devotion, from one end to the other, breathe of such general topics of weakness or strength as appertain to ‘all sorts and conditions of men.’ Let them feel sensibly that they are but as ‘dust and ashes,’ as was their great forefather and patriarch Abraham, in the presence of their Maker. Let them see, confess, and pray for the forgiveness of their own deeply-rooted errors, follies, and absurdities; and let nothing, appertaining to the perishable, as well as equivocal, nature of politics have place within their hearts. Had the three monarchs in question been clothed even with the properties of *angels* (and, assuredly, they were very much *otherwise!*) I would not have their names

in our prayer book. I have also many objections, perhaps to minor points, but they may be secondary ; yet, as a true lover of my country's form of worship, I call upon the higher powers to see whether many asperities may not be smoothed down, many discrepancies harmonized, and many very decided objections—”

“ We had better not, perhaps, extend our remarks,” observed the vicar, “ to more touching and comprehensive points—since no immediate good can result from the discussions ; but the *late Marriage Act* has not, in my opinion, afforded a very favourable specimen either of the wisdom or liberality of modern legislation. It is in vain you tell me that in Scotland marriages are in many instances little better than a mere shake of the hand. Disrobe our marriage ceremony of its *religious* position, and you make it a mere ordinance of *traffic*—a mere object of *barter* as you would for sheep or oxen ; while the clergyman is now considered little better, than a mere lawyer's clerk, to pocket a paltry sixpence for his copy for the superintending registrar.”

“ *There I grant you all you express or require,*” resumed the magistrate ; “ it is very dirty and ungentlemanly work. Better to have quietly corrected, or rendered optional, certain portions of your marriage ceremony ; but, bring ALL men and women

to *Mother Church*. There is no heresy in this, I hope, Mr. Thomson?"

"Dr. Glossop himself would have eulogized its orthodoxy!" replied the curate.

"And yet," resumed the magistrate, "as a lawyer, I have paid much attention to the formularies of marriage; and own, that I was perfectly dumbfounded on being shewn, in a college library, at Cambridge, a huge folio volume, of a *Salisbury Gradual or Missal*, printed abroad in the reign of our Mary,—in being shown, I say, a form of ceremony in which the bride vows to be "*bonair and buxom*,"* to the object of her choice."

"Methinks it is now high time," shouted the Major, "to put an end to this 'tug of war,'—this intellectual collision—

'*Claudite jam rivos pueri! sat pratu liberunt.*'
in other words, there has been both wine and argu-

* It occurs in more than one impression of the *Salisbury Ritual*, although the entire ceremony (with the foregoing exception) be in the Latin tongue. But there is nothing *very* startling in the expressions. "*Buxom*" means simply "*obedient*," and Milton has twice used it in this sense. In his *L'Allegro*, he incorporates two of the above words in one line:

"So *buxom*, blithe, and *debonnair*;"

and in his *Paradise Lost*, he applies the first as designating the *yielding* property of the air, on the visit of Gabriel to Adam, the angel winnowing "*the buxom air*." To be sure, the words immediately following the above, quoted by Mr. Clutterbuck, are a little extraordinary.

ment enough. Let us attend the ladies." So saying he looked at his watch, and almost darted out for the drawing-room.

The gentlemen quickly followed his example ; all appearing to be gratified as well as interested by the general complexion of the conversation which had ensued. It seemed, indeed, obvious to each, that, should they ever meet again upon the same topic, there would be the slightest possible discrepancy of opinion between them. The evening was worthy of all that had preceded it. Charles Ponton would be necessarily now *hors de combat*, for the *many*; and the Major might be occasionally given to rumination and abstraction, yet was the discourse both lively and at times general. There was a little sacred music sung by Mrs. Cranmer and Mrs. Danvers, first separately, and afterwards conjointly. Julia Cranmer was urgently entreated by Mr. Clutterbuck to sing "*Angels ever bright and fair,*" which she accomplished in a style of sweet and penetrating melody, perfectly her own. They then selected choice passages from Mozart's *12th Mass*, and the whole concluded with the grand chorus, of "*Gloria in Excelsis,*" from Pergolesi. At ten, the servants were summoned for prayers in the hall. Reginald Cranmer read them in a style of such unaffected seriousness and depth of tone, that, on rising, the Major declared "Reginald should

have been brought up to the church." On returning to the drawing-room, and partially enfilading a small table of sandwiches, with their *et ceteras*, they all, as if with one consent, began to discourse upon the first-rate importance of *reading* the prayers of the church service as they OUGHT to be read. Mrs. Cranmer and Mrs. Danvers remarked, that it was as essential to good effect as a comely dress upon the human figure.

"Nay, ladies," said Major Dacre, " 'tis more : 'tis the contour, the limbs and muscles of the same figure ; the very blood that gives it vitality and motion. Divest the latter of these qualities, and you render the human form as inert and uninteresting as the lay figure of an artist." Such was one of the many rational and happy *Sabbath evenings* spent at *Thornborough Abbey*.

CHAPTER XIV.

ODDS AND ENDS.—THICKENING OF THE PLOT.—
THE DEATH BED OF THE REPROBATE.

IN the best regulated establishments you can scarcely fail to have what the cook calls, on the ensuing day, "*odds and ends.*" More than one acquaintance has declared his partiality for a dinner, on the *second* day, of the dishes which were served up on the *first*. Doubtless there is a wider range for *Apician* skill ; black may be converted into white, and white into black : sour into sweet, and its converse. The master of the culinary revels has every inducement to the exercise of his talents; and when the servants in attendance come to report to him how this fricandeau was approved, and that rouleau extolled, his bosom beats with no ordinary delight ; because he knows that these very viands, served up in a *new* form, were untouched on the preceding day.

Now, be this admitted or not, it is my intention to serve up a *few dishes* of character and circumstance, which seem to require a little explanation,

although they have not been *before* thought of sufficient importance to divert the stream of our narrative. The reader may not have forgotten the appointment of Mr. Silvertop, the lawyer, to meet on the morrow at Dacre Hall ; and he may be a little curious to know whether or not that appointment took place. There has also been particular mention made of Phœbe Crane. One or two other points remain under solution, and it is as well not to tantalize the reader by shrinking from their examination. Indeed, it is of importance that it should be so. Mr. Silvertop had quitted his house, not in the smoothest humour in the world, in order to wait upon Major Dacre, when a chaise and pair came galloping towards him, to request his immediate attendance at an *inquest*; for he was coroner for the county.

“Where was it to be held?”

“About nine miles off.”

He returned home, merely to put on stouter clothing, and got into the carriage; charging his clerk on no account to stir from home during his absence.

He had scarcely travelled four miles, when, on paying the turnpike, he thought he recognized the figure and countenance of a man, mounted on a fine black horse, who appeared to be only waiting to pass through in the opposite direction. The

man asked the toll-keeper, "if he could put him in the direction of Mr. Silvertop?"

"You are already facing him," rejoined the latter.

"Odds, buddikins!" said the horseman; "but I am glad of this; you must *stand*—but not *deliver*."

He then made an effort to unbuckle his small leathern portmanteau behind him, and taking out some papers, tied with red tape, and a letter, he delivered them to Mr. Silvertop: adding, "I would be glad of a word in your private ear."

"You must get off, and come in," said the lawyer.

"That is impossible," said the man—"for my horse would be sure to fly like the wind back again to his home. He is scarcely three years old. Cannot you draw on one side and get out?"

Mr. Silvertop did not wait for a second entreaty, nor would he allow the postillion to dismount; but opening the door, he leaped upon the ground, and made his ready way to the horseman.

The latter bent down his figure, and they conversed together; the horse making a regular onward motion towards his home. The chaise was left a hundred yards, at least, in the rear. The more they conversed, the deeper seemed to be the anxiety of both parties.

"Not for the world—not for the world!" ex-

claimed Mr. Silvertop:—and here the chaise came up, for the inquest was imperative. The horseman galloped off.

“ I can get in as I got out,” said Silvertop—with an expression of delight with which he was rarely visited: and he got in and shut the door accordingly. The minutes seemed to be dragging, and he chided the post-boy for his slow pace. He was so intent upon the intelligence imparted by the horseman, that he forgot to look at his papers: nor was it till drawing up to the house where the inquest was to be held that he found them—missing ! The fact was, he had placed them so carelessly or hurriedly, that the chaise, on moving onwards from where it had stopped, had jumbled them out of the door left open by its occupant. The letter, however, remained. On opening it, Mr. Silvertop read as follows :

“ Mr. Silvertop. Sir,—The papers here consigned to your charge are of the utmost importance, as affecting the departure of Mr. Reginald Cranmer out of this country. We rely upon the strictest vigilance and most unflinching resolution on your part. Your reward shall be in proportion. Every minute particular for your observance is detailed within. On the acknowledgment of their

receipt, you will not fail to receive a *douceur.*"

New Inn.

We are, &c."

In a bitter moment did Mr. Silvertop read this letter. The papers were lost, or in the road—and what if they were *discovered*! "Gracious heaven: can any visitation be more frightful!"

At this moment the noise of the carriage being heard, several of the inmates where the dead body was deposited came rushing forth, pulled down the steps, offered an arm, and quickly escorted Mr Silvertop into the house. As is not uncommon, one *faux pas* leads to the commission of another. The letter was left open upon the seat, which the natural curiosity of the post-boy led him to make much of. All the world can read now the school-master is abroad; and it was curious to observe how cautiously, quietly, circumspectly, and in a measure huddled up within itself, the post-boy sat about the conning of this epistle. "Who had not heard of Reginald Cranmer?" The boy was told to come within three hours to re-convey Mr. Silvertop to his home. "What was to be done with this letter and the intelligence it contained?" He would get it COPIED, and keep the copy; depositing the original precisely as he had found it, and then take his measures accordingly.

The case was a simple one; except that a deep cut in the temple might render it suspicious whether the deceased came by his death from external assault, or from falling in a fit of apoplexy. A great property was attached to him; but the coroner was so wholly abstracted from recent events, that he merely observed, "Gentleman, you will consider your verdict, and pronounce it accordingly."

"But, sir," observed one of the jury, "we must have a little *evidence* to make up our minds about. We are not so clearly of opinion as you may be disposed to attribute."

"Very well, gentlemen, proceed—proceed," said Mr. Silvertop, looking at his watch.

Two hours of examination ensued. There was a *suspicion*, but it could not be brought *home*. It was better to put an end to the inquiry at once, when it could not proceed upon satisfactory data; and the deceased was said to have died "by the visitation of God."

"*That*, gentlemen," reiterated the coroner, "is your *fixed* opinion?"

"No, not exactly so," replied one of the jury; "but that is our *opinion*."

Mr. Silvertop was enjoined to take a little refreshment, but "he had no appetite. He had left home with a sad headache; and within an hour-and-a-half he hoped to be in bed."

The chaise came, and it was dark as he got in. The first thing his hand alighted upon, in the very act of entrance, was the *opened letter*. It stung him to the quick. How could he have left it there? “Post-boy, did you know there was a letter in the chaise?”

Now, few people in this cheating world know better how to cheat than a post-boy; who replied, “he knew it was there when he shut up the door; but he left it as he found it.”

“And you did not *read* it?”

“Bless you, sir, how can you expect a young fellow like myself to *read*? ”

There is a way, in many cases, of *forcing* yourself to be satisfied, whether you will or not; and although you know it is any thing *but* satisfaction. So it fared with Mr. Silvertop. He urged the boy to make every effort homeward, and particularly to stop if he saw any thing *white* upon the road. They reached the turnpike without observing any thing; but on reaching it, the lawyer recognised the papers in question, in the act of being *read* by the toll-gate keeper—and again opening the door of the chaise, he rushed into the small tenement, and claimed them as his property.

“Gently, sir,” said the keeper of the gate; “I suspect they are as much *my* property as *yours*; your name does not appear upon them.”

"That may be, sir, but they are undoubtedly consigned to my care—as this letter, directed for me, will testify." Mr. Silvertop paused a moment; he dare not show the letter.

"Well, sir, let us *see* the letter," observed the keeper of the toll-gate; "if they belong to you you shall have them; but, belong to whom they may, they contain most extraordinary particulars. The letter, sir—"

"You must not see it."

"Nor shall you have the papers, unless I *do* see it,"—rejoined the turnpike man, folding them up very composedly, and putting them into a beaufet.

The sound of carriage wheels was heard, and Mr. Silvertop bethought of his departure; for he now began to shake and tremble as if he had already committed a crime. "You shall see the letter on the morrow," he observed; "but you promise me, in the meantime, that no one else shall see the papers."

"I do,—but then it must be before *twelve*."

"It shall be so."

Mr. Silvertop reached his home a little before midnight, giving the boy five shillings for his day's labour. The lad turned his horses towards the Queen's Head, and said "he must have a whet before he started for home." The only creature in

the village which he found abroad, was Scrimes, the parish clerk, whom he had known from earliest youth, and into *his* hands he confided the copy of the important letter. The hands were honest: but the poor man trembled whether he ought to *receive* such a document,—keeping it a fortnight before he even presumed to tell his wife.

On entering his office, Mr. Silvertop found his "*fidus Achates*," in great anxiety about his return. Phœbe Crane had called upon him.

But it is essential to pursue our enquiry. Master and man sat up till a late hour. At length the latter was deputed to wake up Jobson and Stubbings, to see if some desperate effort could not be made to redeem the papers at the turnpike. The clerk knew his master's cue, and the two men "screwed their courage to the sticking place" to storm the beaufet and take them away. They proceeded with a good heart, reaching the spot at two in the morning. A broad-wheeled waggon was about to pass through, and the keeper of the gate coming from his warm bed was opening the gate to let it pass. It was agreed that Jobson should hold him in parlance, while Stubbings effected the robbery. It so happened, that one of the waggoner's horses got entangled in the harness, before the toll was paid. This kept the matter in suspense five minutes;—Jobson making believe to assist,

while, in fact, he only prolonged the entanglement. The toll-keeper swore unsparingly. Stubbings was in the meantime busied with the robbery. The beaufet was forced open, the papers stolen, and the doors reclosed with the utmost care.

The next morning the robbers were at Mr. Silvertop's, who could scarcely believe his eyes on a sight of such inestimable treasures. He purposely avoided seeing Jobson and Stubbings, but told his clerk to give them a sovereign a-piece. They were well satisfied; declaring that they would have a brave frolic at the "Jolly Butchers" that evening.

"You told me," said Silvertop to his clerk, "that Phœbe Crane had been here: what did she want?"

"She says she must see *you*: and see you she will."

"And see me she shall *not!*"

"Don't speak so loud, sir, you may be heard." Here the clerk opened the door gently, but there was no one listening. He then approached his master, and whispered softly in his ear.

"Is it even so?" replied the astonished coroner "we must then have recourse to Mr. Ruffham," and forthwith he sallied abroad in pursuit of the apothecary. He found him at home. After a few minutes' conference, the latter desired to be made acquainted with the name of the unfortunate young woman; and on hearing that of *Phœbe Crane*, Mr.

Ruffham slightly hooking his finger in the button-hole of Silvertop's coat, told him that "no consideration upon earth should make his drugs auxiliary to the prevention of a human being from coming into the world. Mr. Silvertop might seek his remedy elsewhere." The coroner muttering, left the abode of the Apothecary.

The hours of JEREMIAH SPARK, the blacksmith, were numbered. It was impossible for human nature to sustain such repeated assaults of the grossest intemperance. Spark had become habitually drunk from morning till night. There was scarcely a lucid interval, which, when it *did* possess him, was not devoted to the abuse of the church and clergy.

"My dear Mr. Spark," said his wife, kneeling by his bedside, and looking down gently upon his face, "don't you think you had better send for the parson?"

"What—for Jeremy Jumps, your tinkering soul-botcher?"

"Oh no, my dear! for Mr. Markham or Mr. Thomson."

"What to do?"

"To pray by you;—to stand between you and your —"

"I hate the sight of a parson. He can't pro-

long my existence—which I now know to be of short duration.”

“ True : but he may render the short time of your abiding here comparatively easy. *Do let me !*”

“ Mrs. Spark, if I saw a black-coat in my room I should go raving mad :—I’m sure of it.”

There was no making any head against so broad a declaration ; and Mrs. Partridge, Mrs. Thimbleton, and Mrs. Scrimes all entering below, nearly at the same moment, it was resolved that Mr. Thomson should be sent for, but that he should make his appearance in a light pepper-and-salt great-coat, which might be easily procured for the occasion.

Almost every minute added to the short and difficult breathing of Spark. He was now quite sensible, and told his wife that any one who was *not* a parson might pray by his side. “ For,” said he,—“ one would not willingly turn one’s back upon human aid, if it be worth seeking.” Half an hour passed on, and the sufferer was becoming exceedingly disturbed and uneasy : his mind getting roused in proportion as his body was sinking fast. Some one knocked at the door. “ Enter,” exclaimed Spark,—“ for God’s sake enter!—give me aid and consolation, whoever you are !” Mr. Thomson made his appearance, habited in a grey great-coat, which was buttoned up to his chin.

"How do you find yourself, Mr. Spark?" inquired he, with a gentle tone of utterance.

"*Find* myself?—why *dying*, that's all.—Can you save me?"

"It is not in the power of mortal man to accomplish that—but a prayer may be put up that heaven ——"

"Will shut its gates *against* me. I know it—I feel it. Kneel down, man, and take my hand in your own, as you open your book of prayer."

Mr. Thomson did so: the wife sobbing bitterly, and kneeling by his side. As he read, Spark raised himself, exclaiming, "'The voice is Jacob's voice,' but the dress is the dress of a stranger. In other words, it is you, Mr. Thomson, that are come to assist a wretched creature, struggling in the very gulf of perdition. I know my follies—my crimes. I confess them all. Throw off that garment, and stand before me in the genuineness of your professional garb!"

Mr. Thomson immediately complied with the dying man's request, and took off the great-coat.

"Oh, sir!" said Spark, now fully reinstated in a tranquil condition,—"Oh, sir, what a comfort to possess you! Do not—do not, I beseech you, leave me comfortless! Tell me all you can—do all you can to bring me back to those paths of peace

from which I have so fatally strayed. Speak!—speak to me!"

"Mr. Spark," replied the curate, rising, and yet holding the hand of the sufferer, "it is out of my power, at this protracted period of your disease, to adopt any plan which should make you whole. The power of working miracles is in higher hands; but that power can scarcely be expected to be exercised in favour of one, who, to speak even in terms of mildness, has, on more occasions than one, affected to hold it in scorn. I do not come to add bitterness to your few lingering moments: no, sir, believe me; but it is equally my duty, as my intention, to tell you that——"

"I am *damned!*—say so—don't mince the matter, sir! I can bear any thing!"

Spark then vehemently clasped his hands—relaxed them—gave one to his wife, and the other to Mr. Thomson.

"Surely, the bitterness of death is past?" exclaimed he—and was beginning to close his eyes: but Mr. Thomson resumed. "My Christian friend, nothing is impossible with God; he may accept your tears (for Spark was now piteously moaning), he may vouchsafe pardon and peace, through the intercession of his Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Turn with your heart and soul towards him. Con-

fess your reprobate habits; ask forgiveness of your wife, whom I know you to have treated with contumely and scorn.....”

The dying man made an effort.....

“All—all is forgiven and forgotten!” replied the wife, choked with lamentation.

“Mr. Thomson,” faintly articulated Spark,— “give me your hands.” They were immediately placed within those of the dying man. “HEAVEN BLESS YOU!” and his spirit escaped with the words.

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTMAS MERRIMENT AT DACRE HALL.

IT will be remembered that several plans were laid for the continuance of those revelries which marked the return of Major Dacre to the hall of his ancestors. Scheme upon scheme, feast upon feast, merriment upon merriment. The whole village was to reel; and then Reginald Cranmer was to begin to think of his departure, towards the month of April, before which time, as the reader will be convinced, a good stroke or two of business was to be successfully encountered.

Two great days were rapidly approaching ; CHRISTMAS-DAY, and NEW YEAR's DAY ;—days, yet of great import in some parts of the country ; days of cordial festivity—described in part with unusual point and cleverness by the author of *Bracebridge Hall* ; days, that do good in all manner of ways ; that put a spirit into the heart of the miserly, who for once in the year think it as well to be generous as otherwise : that set the church-

bells ringing ; that make the yule log crackle and blaze up the chimney ; that cause the merry-hearted to caper ; the old to be young ; the indolent to be active ; and impart fun and fancy to spirits even of the most fastidious culture. Major Dacre had resolved to celebrate these two days at his own residence. The latter day was indeed his *birth-day*. Early on the Monday morning he wrote a letter to his sister after the following fashion :—

“ MY DEAR JULIA,

“ I have been considering all our plans and counter plans ; and have finally resolved to exchange the seat of government (alias the scene of festivity) from Thornborough Abbey to Dacre Hall. You must give me my way—knowing my *imperturbability* in these matters. Send your good-for-nothing daughters here, as soon as you can : and let the scene of operations be forthwith chalked out. If Reginald have nothing better to do, he may accompany them. Understand however, that you are all expected to dine here on CHRISTMAS DAY. And thus, dear sister, I bid you heartily farewell.

“ Your affectionate brother,

“ EDWARD DACRE.”

There could be but one result on the receipt of

such a note. The girls put on their bonnets, and hastened to the hall as fast as their "many twinkling feet" would carry them. Reginald took a sister under each arm, and they were almost ungovernable in their joy—when Scrimes, the parish clerk, met them on quitting the lodge gate.

"What now, Scrimes, what brings you to the Abbey?"

"A word with you, sir, apart," said the man of many Amens.

Julia told Reginald that he might follow at his convenience, but that they would go on to their uncle.

"Please to read this note, sir," said Scrimes to young Cranmer. He read it*—all manner of ways; putting his hand to his chin; then, his forefinger upon his cheek; then his right hand across his forehead; now moving slowly; now standing still, now leaning against the gate. He examined the writing. It was execrable. There was no seal,—no address.

"How did you come by this, Scrimes?"

Scrimes told him that the post-boy, some fourteen days ago, had given it to him.

"Why did you not instantly bring it to me?"

"Alas, sir!" replied the affrighted clerk, "I could not make up my mind. It seemed a thing too terrible to mention."

* See page 232, 237.

"As for *that*," replied Cranmer, "you need not have feared. It is only the injunction of precautionary measures. But to whom is it *addressed*?"

"Heaven knows, sir; for I am sure I do not."

"Well, Scrimes, be as secret as the grave, and it shall not fare the worse for you. You swear—"

"Sir, I swear to any thing you please."

Reginald whipped a half-crown into his hesitating hand, and hastened to join his sisters, who however had reached Dacre Hall before he could overtake them.

He entered with a clouded brow. "Why, Reginald," said Marianne, "we left you

'Blithe as the lark, which each day hails the morn,'
and you enter as demure as a cat! What is the matter? What has Scrimes set on foot, to make you thus thoughtful?"

"Nothing; — absolutely nothing. I kicked a stump of a tree in making a short cut to overtake you, and it has quite upset me."

Major Dacre here entered, shaking them all three by the hand, and proceeded to develope his plans. "My brave Reginald, we must have a grand to-do, on New Year's Day, or rather on the night of the old year."

"With all my heart, sir. What, and as many, as you please."

"A fancy ball!—a fancy ball!" screamed Marianne, "Do—do—dear uncle!"

"I am not sure, my dear girl, that I quite understand that word. Is it an entertainment?"

"A dance—a dance—dear uncle!"

"Well, but you cannot dance without provision, or substance, to keep body and soul together. I presume there must be eating and drinking as well as skipping about?"

"Just so:—let it be a fancy ball."

"It shall be as you wish; but I am very little *au fait* at these matters; only if I once take it up I will go gallantly through with it, depend upon it. It wants twelve days to the thirty-first of December. You have no time to lose. Go into my study and write your notes of invitation, and be sure you ask Lord and Lady Ashton, Sir Henry Risby, Mrs. Freshwater, and the Misses Long, in addition to all our other common well-known friends. We must have from fifty to eighty at the least. A good band; and every thing to cheer and make happy . . .

'Why the deuce should we be sad,
While on earth we moulder?"'

Reginald, a word with you."

The young ladies rushed to the study; ferretted out the note-paper, and sat down lustily to the work of invitation-writing—Marianne writing two for

the one of her sister Julia. The Major and his nephew were left alone ; but what was the surprise, if not astonishment of the former, on being made acquainted, by Reginald, with the purport of the note placed in his hand by Scrimes.

“ Absurd—an utter absurdity !” he replied.

“ I am not quite so sure of that as yourself, sir ; only I know of no one who could have the slightest interest whether I staid at home or went abroad.”

“ It is incomprehensible,” said Major Dacre. “ At any rate you are safe while you *do* stay ; but my dear Reginald, it is not on *this* score that I wish to detain you. I saw you the other evening at Squire Ponton’s, apparently the gayest of the gay.”

“ And, my dear uncle, I saw you at the same party, as happy as a man might well be.”

“ It was even so. I had no notion you were such a songster ; but it must be owned you were well *seconded*. Caroline Ponton has a sweet pipe ?”

“ She has indeed, sir ; and Mrs. Danvers seems to be a good judge of engravings.”

The train was touched. Ignition betrayed itself in the reddened cheeks of Major Dacre ; who, the more he strove to cool and concentrate himself, became the more involved and perplexed. “ Yes, yes,” said he, “ we were looking at Daniel’s Rural Sports together, and she observed, that the ‘ *Retriever* ’ did indeed resemble my favourite ‘ *Dash*.’ ”

"She is a sweet, lady-like woman, sir ; be her observations what they may."

"And you *really* think so, Reginald?"

"On my soul, sir, I think her a most sweet lady."

"Your hand—your hand, my boy ; but Caroline Ponton!"

"Well, sir ; what of her?"

And here it must be owned that something like a faint hectic crept over the cheeks of Reginald Cranmer ; as if recollecting that Caroline, while she played on the harp, had vouchsafed him a few of her penetrating glances.

"Don't you think, sir," said Reginald—like a man floundering deeper and deeper in the mire, as he essays to get out—"it would be common charity to invite the '*lone widow*' to your Christmas banquet ? I don't wish you to extend the circle unnecessarily."

"What ! not to Caroline Ponton?" replied the ready Major.

"No, sir ; because I know that on Christmas Day the whole family at Thornborough Abbey chuse to dine together, with the exception of Charles—who will of course be *en attendant* here, with Marianne."

"It shall be so, Reginald, and I thank you for the hint."

A note was dispatched to Mrs. Danvers on the same day.

At this instant, to their astonishment and delight, Maria Cranmer made her appearance; calm, composed, tranquil, even to melancholy. Major Dacre rose to embrace her, and Reginald kissed her hand which was extended towards him. "I thought," she said, "my sisters were here?"

"They are in the next room, and I will bring them to you."

They entered with delight; and kissing Maria, they all sat down together and talked over the fancy ball. Maria expressed herself quite delighted with both, and thought she might take a part in the first; but her uncle strongly dissuaded her. She said "she could enact the part of a *bride*, she was sure."

"But my dear Maria, there may be no bride in the piece," observed Cranmer; and it was agreed that she should dance with her uncle the first two dances. She continued the whole day with her sisters at Dacre Hall, and even wrote half a dozen invitations. Nothing could be more agreeable and more conformable. Her care-worn countenance beamed with a secret inward satisfaction, but it was evident, on a close survey, that an inward canker, a corrosive worm, was "feeding on her damask cheek." Her form had lost much of its plumpness; her

breath was short ; her appetite well nigh gone, and her powers of conversation impaired. Her eyes, sinking deeper and deeper in her head, had a shifting, glassy lustre. Her cough was tight and hacking. She was secretly wishing to be at rest. Most passionately fond was she of Reginald, and it must be confessed that, of all his sisters, Reginald loved Maria the best. Her confiding simplicity of manner, her beautiful figure, her musical voice—rendered yet more musical by the melancholy of her condition—served to distract her devoted brother. There is no affection which partakes so strongly of what may be called a heavenly temperament, as that between brother and sister. It is mental, but not insensible to bodily perfection ; it is etherial, but not divested of worldly intelligence ; it is pure, but an angel's frame gives a crown to its purity. No one can think of entering an everlasting paradise of blessed spirits, without being in a measure prepared to witness grace of form accompanying purity of intellect. Even in our reflections upon the great PRIME MOVER—the framer and regulator of the universe—we cannot dispossess ourselves of *perfection of form*—perhaps vast and immeasurable—but still **PERFECT**.

It is the twenty-fifth day of December, and the Major is among the happiest of men. He had received five letters that morning ; of which, one bore

the post mark of “*Manheim*,” and the other that of “*Stuttgart*.” They both appertained to Reginald’s business, but he should know nothing of their contents till the evening. All the Cranmers, with both the clergymen, and their families, Mrs. Danvers, and Charles Ponton, were assembled at Dacre Hall. But the hospitable boast of the day was to be found below stairs; where thirty-five of the principal villagers were assembled with all the dames we have mentioned, excepting Mrs. Smithers and Mrs. Spark: the latter was, indeed, made happy by the presence of her godly friend, who had now the entire “fare of the primitive christians” to themselves. Mrs. Smithers was of necessity compelled to attend to the “Jolly Butchers,” where, indeed, the Squire had sent a quarter of an ox for the poor; but at the Queen’s Head there was half an ox, and Tuffnell, the parish constable, presiding, the scene was one of perfect hilarity and happiness. Mrs. Thimbleton had the honour of sitting by Mr. Thorpe’s right hand in the Servant’s Hall, while Scrimes, Tibbets, Briskett, and Bunn, with their respective wives and sweethearts, graced each side of the long table—upon which pipes were placed after dinner for the fancies of such as chose to smoke. In the centre, of capacious dimensions, hung the Druidical *mistletoe*; to which all eyes were upwards turned on the completion of

the repast. As they were to have a *fiddle* in the evening, it was settled, after a somewhat sharp debate, and with the protest of five dissentient voices, that no *mystic rites* were to be observed till *nine* of the clock.

Dacre Hall presented a very singular and striking appearance. It might be said to have been embedded in berries, laurustinus, holly, and misletoe. The Major was for doing things on a large and spirit-stirring scale. He would have the central lamp in the drawing-room smothered with *mistletoe*. Every lady in the room on her entrance was to go "under the yoke." Mrs. Danvers seemed to be struck all of a heap, as quite unprepared for such a ceremony; but it was observed that she surrendered without a struggle. There was sad scrambling work between Charles Ponton and Marianne, especially as the former insisted upon a *repetition* of that felicity which had been so imperfectly granted at first. Nothing could exceed the air of abundance and happiness which prevailed on all sides. The dinner was *awfully* abundant. A baron of beef seemed to cover half the side-board. The dragons were put on, grinning in all their "beauteous deformity," and crowned with berries. Massive cups and goblets; ostrich eggs, mounted with silver; three tankards, of which the centre held a gallon. It was filled with what is techni-

cally called *Cup*; and the whole group or set out of plate was backed by a salver, representing the Duke of Wellington, surrounded by his Generals, in the centre. Roast beef and plum pudding, turkey and minced pies, might be said to cover the cloth. In the centre of the table was an *épergne* filled with all manner of *bons-bons*. Mrs. Thomson brought her three eldest children, according to the express desire of the Major. The poor little dears turned their eyes in all directions but on their plates: their mother checked and chided, but to no purpose; it was as a scene of fairy land to them. Mr. Thorpe, with three liveried servants, entirely occupied their attentions. Never was a repast more thoroughly encountered by hungry and active guests, and never were the spirits of those guests in a more enviable state of elevation.

“I love the keeping of Christmas, Mr. Markham!” exclaimed the Major, and challenging him to a glass of Chambertin.

“Such wine as *this*, sir,” replied the Vicar, “will make folks happy and satisfied at *all* seasons of the year—but, Mr. Reginald Cranmer, you are dull?”

“Not at all, sir,” observed Reginald abruptly, and sunk in a deeper reverie.

It is true, Caroline Ponton was away; but I suspect that Reginald Cranmer was thinking of the note put into his hand by Scrimmes.

"Well, Reginald," observed the uncle ; "here is good news to-day from *Fürstenhoff*, which may out-balance all your feverish apprehensions in regard to a certain note." And so saying, he took the two letters from his pocket, and showed the respective post marks of Stuttgart and Manheim.

"Let me see—let me see, sir," was Reginald's instant reply.

"Another time—by and by ; you shall not slip on your night-cap till you see them. I promise you *that*."

Our young hero rubbed his hands, broke from the trammels of his reverie, and challenged right and left, adding, in a *sotto voce* to his sister, Marianne, "I think Charles Ponton the happiest man at table!"

He might have spared that remark ; but Charles took his revenge by the proposition of a sly toast—"Caroline Ponton!"

"With all my heart !" exclaimed Reginald.

Meanwhile his mother, remarking all that passed, proposed to her brother the adjournment to the drawing-room—where they would mature and methodize their plans, and acquaint him with the result as soon as he joined the ladies. The young ones would be glad of a change of scene.

The Major would on no account hear of so abrupt a departure, but insisted on their remaining

another half-hour at the least. In fact, he was at that moment particularly engaged with Mrs. Danvers, upon the propriety, or otherwise, of throwing out a bay window at the extremity of the room ; and he could not brook interruption. Within his arm's length was a dish of golden pippins, having a label, " With Mrs. Thimbleton's dutiful respects."

He made almost every one at table partake of them—but the Curate declared that " he beat Mrs. Thimbleton hollow in the department of golden pippins ;" though he was compelled to confess that his two trees had been *slips* from the stock in her garden.

" Mrs. Thimbleton is a good creature," observed the Vicar ; " and with your permission, sir, we will toast her."

Nothing pleased the Major better. He slyly rung the bell, and, on Thorpe's appearance, he beckoned, and softly told him to tell Mrs. Thimbleton that the Vicar had proposed her health, which was drank *nem. con.*"

" And pray, sir, how is *that*?" said the astonished butler.

" *Nemine contradicente, man !*"—roared the Major.

" I am sure, sir, I shall never be able to get through that *nemin . . contra*—"

"Make what you can of it, and away!" exclaimed the master of the revels.

Every heart now seemed to be full: the children laughed because the noise increased: the grown-up laughed because the children were so happy. In vain did Mrs. Thomson keep her fore finger erect, and occasionally shake her head: her children were in ecstacies, for Reginald and Charles Ponton were doing all in their power to add to their excitement.

"By-the-by, Mr. Vicar," observed Reginald; "it was with difficulty I could get a sight of you in your pulpit this morning; for our church was so crammed with Christmas, I thought that *Birnam Wood had come to St. Martin's.*"

"It was bravely furnished; it does one's heart good to see it," said Major Daere. "I absolutely thought my own pew was 'a pleasant grove for wits to walk in,'—to borrow the language of a quaint title to a very strange and diverting old book."

"It might have been so," observed Mr. Markham; "but through the branches of holly, on each side of the pulpit, I could plainly discern Mrs. Thorpe in the act of pencilling the text in her memorandum-book.* In her own phrase, she was *texting* me. She would find the same text and the same discourse (at least with slight alterations)

* Page 88.

preached two years ago ; as Mr. Thomson and I alternate our duties on this day."

"Hark ! the bells are ringing merrily," said Charles Ponton ; "who would not be a bell-ringer?"

"Not *you*," said Marianne Ponton ; "for a bushel of gold ducats."

"Ha ! Marianne," exclaimed her brother ; "you are taking me to the Castle of Fürstenhoff. Sir, your letters," turning to the Major.

"A non, anon, sir"

And here Mrs. Cranmer rose.—"Well, girls, prepare for snap-dragon up stairs,"—shouted the Major.

"Oh, mamma," said the juvenile Thomsons,— "do pray let us have snap-dragon ; but what is it?"

"Hush, children!"—and here the ladies took leave. How could the gentlemen be happy in their absence ? And wherefore should they indulge in conversation without them ? Major Dacre took his nephew aside, and placing the letters, received that morning, in his hands, told him to take them home with him ; for he would have enough to do up stairs, without meditating on their contents. They were, in fact, most satisfactory ; and in April, he thought, Reginald might venture after the "golden ducats." As on the first night of his arrival, all the lamps were

blazing within Dacre Hall. In fact, the present was a sort of rehearsal for New Year's Day. The gentlemen prepared to join the ladies, but Reginald contrived to linger behind. The *letters* were too tempting to be left longer unread. Their contents were somewhat vague, as well as miscellaneous: but on the whole they afforded satisfaction. In rejoining the party, Reginald, whether purposely or not, lost his ‘way,’ or rather, wandered into the corridor. He was alone. A noble fire ‘was blazing at either extremity of the room’—“*There she is!*” said he, placing himself opposite the portrait of Lady Arabella*—beautiful as spring. Her eyes penetrate, and her lips breathe. She will speak anon. Was ever human being so fair and so winning? What loveliness! Grant me but—stay, stay, there is more than a *faint* resemblance. The figure—the arms—the colour of the hair. If she would only *speak*, it must be”—

“CAROLINE PONTON!” shouted the Major from the other end of the gallery: for, on missing his nephew, he had something like a presentiment where he might be—his sister having prepared him† for his adoration of the painting.

“My dear uncle,” said the nephew, “if you love me, never let a word of what has passed escape your lips—for the present let us join the

* Page 18.

† Page 92.

ladies." Major Dacre loved his nephew too well to deny him so urgent, and at the same time so rational, a request.

On entering the drawing-room, they found the party contracted round a circular table, of which the centre was covered with answers to the notes of invitation for the thirty-first. Lord and Lady Ashton, Sir Henry Risby, Mrs. Freshwater, and the Misses Long, would all be "too happy" to make their appearance. A difficulty presented itself at Hasleby Park. Dr. Glossop was still "in waiting" there; and the Squire could not leave him alone. "Ask him, ask him, my dear uncle," observed Reginald, "but upon this express condition—that he leaves his *Phlosboterotontodon* behind him!" A scream of merriment ensued. "What might that frightful word mean? No man in his seven senses would desire to be so accompanied. The very sound of such a thing was sufficient to frighten mirth, and dispel gaiety. The odious man!" Reginald allowed his sisters to have it all their own way: when he explained to them precisely what it meant—namely, that when Dr. Glossop found all fair and sensible argument upon any given subject—and especially upon theology—untenable, or unavailing, he would have recourse to *manner* rather than to *matter*: and down came his *Phlosboterotontodon* battering-

ram, like a great steam-engine hammer, to pound you to atoms. “Heaven defend me from coming in the way of it”—said Marianne Cranmer: and it was agreed that an invitation should be sent to Dr. Glossop, under the express condition that he should come without his “battering-ram.”

They then fell to work to arrange the entire ceremony. The company were to assemble at nine. Not a creature was to think of making his appearance without an *appendage* of some sort, which might be *called* a fancy-dress. Coffee and tea were announced; but where was the *snap-dragon*? In the adjacent room: with all the lights extinguished, and the raisins blazing in a blue flame, as if the rites of incantation were about to begin—waiting only for the Witches in Macbeth to commence their operations. Some of the company from the servants’ hall was admitted; and especially Mrs. Thimbleton—who, since the delivery of the message from the Major by Thorpe, the butler, may be said to have increased three inches in girth. Nearer thirty than twenty were in the room, which was of narrow dimensions. They jostled against each other. The young Thomsons were screaming in extacy. The laugh, the joke, and the snatch, went round: while the servants, in a ring, were absolutely convulsed with laughter. Reginald Cranmer and Charles Ponton contrived

to cause blue flame to issue from their mouths—to the mingled terror and delight of the little Thomsons, Mrs. Thorpe, Mrs. Thimbleton, and Mrs. Partridge. Here the Major put an end to the uproar, by ordering the punch-bowl to be filled to the brim, and to take the place of the snap-dragon. It was all in readiness: a capacious bowl of six gallons, filled to the brim, with almonds floating on the surface. The more they drank, the fuller it seemed to be: but there is reason in all things. The bowl found its way down stairs, with an express understanding that not more than *half* of its contents should be demolished on the same evening; the residue to be bottled for the festivities on the New Year's day. Mr. Thorpe knew his master's habits too well to disobey his slightest injunctions; and eighteen bottles of punch were set aside for a future occasion.

Who might not have envied the happiness of Dacre Hall on such an anniversary of the Birth of Christ? Who, that had Christian hearts bounding within them, might not have wished to partake of such hospitable fare, such warm-hearted demonstrations of a feeling—"which yet wants a name?" What, although the blast of winter was *abroad*, and the entire country was steeped in deep snow, yet was it the warmth of summer within *Dacre Hall!* And then, how far

and wide were the charities of its owner distributed ! If a kindly Providence had given that owner wealth, it had also bestowed on him a heart for its proper distribution. Major Dacre may be supposed to have made the whole village his family ; and they might all have been said to have slept that night beneath his sheltering wings.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEW YEAR'S DAY AT DACRE HALL.—LOVE'S
STRATAGEM.

"Good Morrow, Mr. Silvertop," said Major Dacre, as the former entered his study ; "I have been expecting you this week past."

"Sir, I give you good day ; but I have been torn to pieces with business of one description or another ; and I beg to apologize."

"Better late than never, Mr. Silvertop. I have read the draft which you left with me. It will want a good deal of correction, and we must deliberately talk it over ; but to-day is a day of days, and I have no disposition to enter upon business of *any* description—except I may put into your hands the copy of a strange note, directed to the Lord knows who, touching my nephew, Reginald."

"If I mistake not, sir," observed Silvertop somewhat vaguely—as if obliquely struck by a spent ball ;—"to-morrow is your *birth-day*? Many happy returns. I shall be glad to see this note."

The Major rummaged in all directions ; but he

could not lay his hand upon it. Reginald had, in fact, taken care of it; so that after a few more ordinary speeches, the Major and his guest took leave of each other—not without an invitation, on the part of the former, that the latter would make his appearance in the evening. Mr. Silvertop bowed lowly, and took his departure.

The “*note*” was as wormwood to him—inasmuch as there could not be *two* notes to the same effect. He was afraid to ask by what *channel* he had received it, and yet, why should he not? He was afraid to ask the *purport* of it, and yet, where was the harm of such a question? Never did a man display profounder abstraction of thought than did the coroner, as he left Dacre Hall. He moved in a stiff, rigid manner, as if every step was to contain so many feet; his eyes mechanically fixed upon every step which he took. On leaving, he met Mr. Clutterbuck—or rather he almost ran against him.

“ In deep thought, Mr. Silvertop, upon the hopelessness of the last case, for I cannot suppose you to be occupied with a *prosperous* one, from the bent of your brows?” said the magistrate.

“ Why, Mr. Clutterbuck,” replied the coroner, “ you know well enough that lawyers have not always the *sunny* side of things to bask upon.”

“ A strange robbery, this, at the toll-gate the

other evening. I have had Sanderson up with me, and—”

“ What may it be, sir ?” resumed Silvertop, staring and looking as wildly as if ten thousand pounds had been decamped with.

“ We must look into the bottom of it another day.”

“ Yet another day !”—added Silvertop, delighted to find that no *immediate* examination was to be instituted ; and too happy to make a second escape from premises which threatened the extinction of his best wishes and brightest hopes.

Mr. Clutterbuck entered Dacre Hall. He merely made a morning call of congratulation on the approach of the Major’s birth day, and to communicate the strange intelligence of the robbery at the toll-gate.

“ No robberies—no imprisonments—no prosecutions on this day, my dear Mr. Clutterbuck !”—exclaimed the Major ; “ we shall see you to-night ?”

“ Habited like my original picture of Judge Coke ?” answered the magistrate ; who, on taking leave, was resolved to thread the residences of a few of his neighbours.

It was a fine morning, with the snow lying crisp and hard upon the ground. All the villagers were abroad ; and Mr. Clutterbuck met the two Miss Cranmers on their route to Hasleby Park.

"Walking for an evening colour, young ladies?" observed the magistrate.

"Walking for bodily exercise, Mr. Clutterbuck," replied Julia Cranmer; "my mamma is at home, and will, I am sure, be glad to see you."

Now, it so happened that the magistrate would have preferred walking with the Miss Cranmers to a solitary *tête-a-tête* with their mother; but it was quite evident that the young ladies were not desirous of his society. More is often, and justly, *inferred* than the exact construction of the premises warrants. There is a *façon de parler* of the weight of a thousand words. Mr. Clutterbuck formally took off his hat, and made for the Abbey. On reaching Hasleby Park, the Miss Cranmers at once entered upon the subject matter of their visit—in the presence of Caroline Ponton, alone. It was neither more nor less than that she should assume the *precise dress* of Vandyke's portrait of Lady Arabella. It was in vain that Caroline urged the absence of roses, and lillies, and other flowers in the month of January—in order to make the resemblance complete.

"And then, my *hair*, dear Julia! Will it ever *deploy* into such pretty convolutions as we see upon the canvas? Besides, I am not quite so tall."

"Oh! never mind these secondary considerations! Any flowers will do—and our united conservatories will supply them. As for your hair, it

does everything but *speak*. We only want it to tell *one tale*."

"In the name of heaven, what may all this mean?" observed Caroline.

"No matter; you promise us, dear Caroline, that you will dress in the precise manner of the portrait of Lady Arabella at Dacre Hall. It must be allowed that it is a *winning* dress."

Still there were difficulties and obstacles urged—not from the apprehension of expense, for the dress was a plain one, and the white satin had been worn at the last race-ball, where all the grandes of the county made a point of attendance—in their choicest plumage. The hair seemed to be the difficulty. Mama was consulted; but Mrs. Ponton, of naturally shrewd capacity, seemed to leap at the conclusion at once—saying, "there was no difficulty at all in the case, and Caroline should look as well as the best of them."

Peals of laughter ensued. "You promise," said Marianne at parting.

"And will *keep* my promise," replied Caroline Ponton.

Meanwhile the preparations at Dacre Hall, which had been going on for the last five days, now assumed their complete form. The grand hall of entrance and the corridor were the chief apartments for the reception of the company. Mr. and

Mrs. Thorpe had scarcely a leg to stand upon when the day came—so unintermitting had been their attention; and it must be confessed that the Major himself stood in need of a little repose before the “*hurly burly*” began. Reginald had been the constant inmate of the hall to arrange every necessary preliminary; having had many battles to fight with his uncle, and more with the butler and his mate. Upon some points it was impossible to make an impression upon the obtusity or perverseness of the latter—and Reginald yielded with the best grace he could. “What is to be *your* attire?” said his uncle.

“Oh, sir, anything—everything: a hermit—a harlequin—a Spaniard, strumming a guitar—a gentleman of the time of Vandyke.”

“I like the *latter*,” said the Major. “Oblige me by assuming the dress of Lord Dacre in his slash sleeves, with a sweeping white feather over a black velvet hat; and red breeches and stockings. You remember it?”

“Perfectly sir; it is in the corridor, near the portrait of Lady Arabella. It shall be done; although I shall be put to it, I fear, for the red department of the clothing.”

“Not at all. The old family chest will supply everything. For myself, I shall wear my hussar uniform—”

" In which you met and overcame your Fürstenhoff assailant !"

" Just so : within the hour we shall be ready.

" Come what come may ;
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day !'"

So saying, both uncle and nephew betook themselves to the toilet ; and it must be confessed that few boarding-school young ladies ever anticipated their *début* in public with hearts more elated ; each, in secret, having something like an assurance of the *fixing* of their *destinies* by that evening's adventure.

It cannot be denied that Reginald Cranmer looked admirably well. Disdaining his habitual stoop, he seemed, by the assistance of his hat and feathers, to be full six feet high. He was a fit cavalier for the most lovely and adventurous dame. His uncle eyed him with inward delight. For the Major—he looked and moved the finished gentleman. Widows and maidens might have even " pulled caps" for him. But the great bell rings, and the first arrival is announced. " Lord and Lady Ashton,"—a sad reproof upon the tenants of Haselby Park and Thornborough Abbey. Why or wherefore, it cannot now be ascertained, but my Lord Ashton and his lady chose to come as a Morris Dancer and Maid Marian. " Welcome—welcome, my dear Lord ; a thousand times wel-

come!"—and hands were seized and warmly shaken.

The Cranmers followed within a minute: the mother arrayed in dark green velvet, with a sort of imperial cap, and tiara of diamonds, as *Queen Catherine*, in *Henry VIII*. She looked and moved the very character. Julia Cranmer, strangely enough, chose to personate Venus—but it was the “*Venus pudica*” of the ancients. She was all radiance—in complexion, in dress, and in ornament. There was a cestus or girdle, in which, as of the Homeric kind, you might fancy was concentrated “every art and every charm.”* She assumed the character chiefly to introduce the two little elder Thomsons, as her attendant *Cupids*—armed with bows and arrows, and surmounted with wings. The little rogues ran about the corridor the whole evening; scarcely deigning to receive one command from their mother. Marianne Cranmer had determined upon ‘*Sweet Anne Page*’—as she was sure of her sweet *Mister Fenton*. Altogether, these five grouped beautifully, and the Major with difficulty checked himself from saluting them before Lord and Lady Ashton.

“Another, and another still succeeds.”

* Pope's version is —

“In this, was every art and every charm,
To win the wisest, and the coldest warm.”

The Markhams, the Thomsons, Mr. Clutterbuck, as *Judge Coke*, in scarlet and ermine; Mr. and Mrs. Ruffham as *Apollo* and *Diana*; a lyre, and a brow encircled by bay leaves, easily characterized the first; a quiver, filled with arrows, and a bow, marked the second; but Mrs. Ruffham also looked the character. Her full beaming eye, of sapphire blue, her length of eyelash, and decision of eyebrows, together with the witchery of her mouth—whether closed or opened—her expansive forehead, and the mother-of-pearl crescent, elevated on the summit of the braided hair, made her, perhaps, “the observed of all observers.” One of Julia Cranmer’s Cupids came to borrow an arrow from her quiver.

“Tell your mama,” said the ready Diana, “that *my* arrows do not belong to *your* bow.”

Sir Henry Risby, as *Justice Shallow*, admirable! Mrs. Freshwater, as the *Nurse in Juliet*: the Misses Long, three of them—as the *Fates*. The corridor is fast filling: but where are the Pontons? Dr. Glossop, in a complete suit of black velvet, with a full bottomed wig, smothered in mareschal powder; a cane in his right hand. Mr. and Mrs. Ponton; the former in a complete hunting suit; of which the cap was said to have been worn by Squire Western; buckskins, boots, and a red jacket constituted the rest. Mrs. Ponton was

Dame Quickly. Charles Ponton, habited as a huntsman, with a fox's brush round his hat. Tyndale, as the “*admirable Crichton*,” in a crotchety dress, half harlequinaded ;—this was assumed at the particular request of Jemima Ponton, but nobody in the room understood it.

Reginald was walking with Lord Ashton towards the other end of the corridor, when the Pontons entered : their entrance was anxiously watched by his sisters ; who, when they saw Caroline, the living, *moving* portrait of Lady Arabella, could scarcely contain their joy. It was agreed between them, that Marianne should put her in the precise attitude of the Vandyke portrait, and Julia should go up to her brother to direct his attention in that quarter. They did so.

“ Heaven defend us !” said Reginald to his sister Julia ; “ who have we yonder ? It is—it is—as I had wished, but dared not to expect. Why, as I breathe, it is—CAROLINE PONTON ! No, it is the *Lady Arabella* herself—walked out of the canvas. My destiny is fixed.”

So saying, Reginald Cranmer approached Caroline Ponton.

“ Oh ! Miss Ponton, you have indeed—”

And here he pulled off his hat so awkwardly that the end of the feather brushed her cheeks.

The lady curtsied solemnly, but gracefully. “ Is

it time to *speak*, sir?" replied she, with admirable dry humour.

"Yes, Caroline, it *is*—and to tell me that you accept—not only my *hand*, but my **HEART**—"

"In sweet disorder lost, she blushed consent."

But we must away—to look after other characters. Where is Mrs. Danvers? She comes, habited as *Evening*; the dress borrowed chiefly from the description of Cowper.* She wore a black veil, powdered with silver stars, and her drapery was black satin. A crescent moon surmounted her hair. On her entrance, Major Dacre walked up, and took her arm.

"You are rather late, Mrs. Danvers. I hope no accident."

"Nothing; except that Mr. Silvertop, as I was going to dress, called to have a few words with me: and so I went up to make my toilet a full half hour later than I intended."

"Mr. Silvertop!" rejoined the Major;—"what could *he* have to say to you? But I expect him here to-night."

The coroner had too *many* parts to play at home, to allow him to dispossess himself of them all at

* "Not sumptuously adorned, not needing aid,
Like homely-featured Night, of clustering gems;
A star or two just twinkling on thy brow
Sufficeth thee." *Task, Book IV.*

Dacre Hall; and he never made his appearance. The throng increased: jewels and gems, and all the brave finery to trick out the young and the old, were put into due requisition. Turks, Albanians, Orientalists, the Bayaders. The muster was nearer a hundred than eighty. The Major, in pacing up and down the corridor, between his sister and Lady Ashton, thought he discovered a face which he had well known before. The light mustachios confirmed the supposition, for they were natural. He went up—and his *Fürstenhoff* assailant betrayed himself, bowing to the ground. Thorpe had smuggled him in. The Major was delighted—and turning to his nephew, found him so immovably fixed by the side of Caroline Ponton, on a distant settee, that he could not catch his eye: but he told the foreigner he was heartily welcome.

Genuine love stands in no need of situation, time, or season, for its developement. On the hottest sands of Africa, on the coldest snows of Siberia—in caverns, impenetrable to-day, and on banks of violet upon which an Italian “moonlight sleeps”—it will betray itself, and pour forth its “secret, unpremeditated strain.” While the busy throng was parading the room—while the loud laugh, the saucy repartee, and the indiscriminate remark, was flying abroad on all sides, Reginald

Cranmer and Caroline Ponton had wholly devoted themselves to private converse. It seemed as if all the passion of the former, pent up and repressed for so long a time, had suddenly broke loose, and was overwhelming him with an agony too intense for expression. It seemed as if he were *chiding* himself for past stupidity and neglect. In the object by his side, there was concentrated all that seemed lovely and fond—intelligent and admirable: fine principles, a fine understanding, a heart, seated where genuine passion would always wish it to be seated—in *nature* and not in *art*. Such was the CAROLINE of REGINALD's bosom. Why he had not plucked this apple of gold before, seemed somewhat unaccountable; or, rather, perhaps, it was wisely postponed to the present auspicious moment.

But the dance is begun. Weippert's band is in full force; and Reginald and Caroline join the festive throng. To see, was to admire them: every one looking up to the suspended portraits, and down upon their representatives in the circle. Here come Sir Joseph, Lady, and Miss Proudfoot: as the King and Queen, and Ophelia, in Hamlet. Who is that quiet, beautiful, and unobtrusive figure, which glides along the dado, and now sits down, and now rather creeps than walks? It is Maria Cranmer; dressed in coral shells and sea-

weeds : an ocean-nymph. She approaches her uncle, and challenges him to make good his promise of dancing two dances with her. They fly off at a tangent . . .

“ Now strike the golden lyre again ;
A louder yet, and yet a louder strain.”

They are waltzing—whisk and away!—round and round like tee-totums. Mr. Clutterbuck and Mrs. Freshwater ; Charles Ponton and Marianne ; Lord Ashton and Mrs. Cranmer; Apollo and Venus : Sir Henry Risby and Diana. (It may be briefly noted, that Sir Henry and Julia Cranmer seemed to shun each other the whole evening.) Tyndale and Jemima Ponton ; Major Dacre and Mrs. Danvers. Where are the recently-betrothed ? They are again sitting down. Waltzing makes them giddy. Love makes them steady. How he gazes on her!—while she is looking down, and tapping her left hand with her fan. What can they mean?—and wherefore are they the mark for every one to shoot their shafts of quizzery or ridicule ? They heed it not. Caroline looks up, and just touches Reginald’s arm with her left hand, while her right seems to be enforcing some argument, or urging some point—whether relating to ducats, or documents, is uncertain. It is clear that it is of importance ; for an air of seriousness

gathers upon the brow of her lover. Here comes up Squire Ponton with the view halloo.

" My dear Caroline, you are earnestly engaged with Mr. Cranmer. Why do you not dance?"

" It is not for want of being *asked*, sir," rejoined the daughter.

" Well, well—as you please;"—and here the Squire's eyes run over with happiness. He saw that the nail was clenched. " I won't disturb them," he observed; " for I would have almost cut any man's throat who ventured to bore me with his company in a similar situation. Mrs. Ponton must know what is passing." But that amiable and sagacious lady had clearly predicted the result.

" My dear," said she to her husband, " when Julia and Marianne Cranmer came to our house this morning, and hatched the plot of dressing Caroline like the portrait of Lady Arabella—and when they talked of her hair *speaking*, and telling only *one tale*, do you suppose I could not guess what was to follow?"

" Thou art shrewd—thou art shrewd, wife: but this is the happiest day of my life: How they look—born for each other!" And in good sooth they *did* so look.

But we must away, and attend to the company. There are ten figures, dressed in suits of sables,

with a deep red scarf, topped by a silver rosette over the shoulder—the scarf being tied on the left side in a very large, ruffling bow. It is the *Council of Ten*—from Venice. They take off their hats, and salute; and then, upon a preconcerted signal with the musicians, they dance “THE SWORD DANCE.* All sit down to look on with astonishment—Charles Ponton and Marianne keeping time; and Tyndale and Jemima Ponton looking with an earnestness, as if they meant to perform the same on the morrow. It had altogether a grand effect; and the Major was quite unprepared for it. On its conclusion, he walked up and saluted the dancers. They were Cambridge men,—the acquaintances of his nephew and Charles Ponton.

“Allow me, my dear Major,” said Lord Ashton, “to introduce you to Sir Benjamin Burridge on his promotion;” but to what specific object this promotion alluded, was not mentioned by the intro-

* Mr. Braham, the celebrated vocalist, has a genuine picture by the elder Breughel, in which, among other demonstrations of wild mirth, on a fair time, is a group of figures, practising the SWORD-DANCE. The sword-dance among the Scotch is a very different, and not a little perilous, amusement. The instrument is laid down upon the ground, with its edge upwards, and the dancer is to perform his evolutions so as to escape unhurt. This may evince dexterity, but it imparts fear.

ducer. Away they all start again ; four quadrilles —each containing sixteen dancers.

Mrs. Cranmer here came up, and whispered her brother, that as the clock was beginning to strike “little hours,” it might be as well to descend to supper : and down they went “in gallant trim :” not however, before Julia Cranmer had disposed of her two Cupids, by carrying them to “beds of down in Paphian bowers.” It were needless to class the company. All the lovers would be necessarily arm in arm ; and Reginald and Caroline were the first to “take up ground.” Lady Ashton and Mrs. Cranmer each graced the side of the Major; but, by a previous arrangement, there was a small table especially reserved for such who “fed on love,” as well as pheasants and partridges ; and it was observed that this, out of the four tables, was the *dullest* in the hall. Dr. Glossop entreated to have the privilege of proposing the health of Major Dacre, and many happy returns of *the day* which had been just entered upon—as the anniversary of his *BIRTH DAY*—with “three times three.” The Doctor shook an ounce or two of powder out of his wig at every wave of his right hand. The cheer was echoed and re-echoed to the very skies—even to the shades below ; where the servants responded in a most uproarious and effective manner.

“ Ah, Doctor ?” exclaimed Mr. Clutterbuck, a

little sarcastically, “we can do now without your *Phlosboterotontodon!*”

“Beware, sir, beware; or I may *demolish* you in a moment,—” replied the sturdy champion of the old school of Oxford divinity: but he was too busy in demolishing *other* things to attempt to carry his threat into effect.

Maria Cranmer retired to rest after the toasting of her uncle. It had been a day of unusual excitement for her, and her mother strongly urged the measure.

While the banquet was in full brim, and while every heart, as every cup, overflowed, the German from Fürstenhoff Castle, came up to Reginald Cranmer, desiring to speak with him. Reginald received him with rather an air of disdain; and wondered how and why he should think of again intruding himself at Dacre Hall? “What did he want of him?”

“Your uncle, sir, did not receive me so; nor would you, if you knew what tidings I brought.”

“A thousand apologies, sir, but you saw how I was engaged.”

Reginald had in fact been in close conversation with his beloved Caroline; pulling a geranium out of her bouquet, and fastening it into his button-hole. The ladies had now retired. Major Dacre made up to the German and his nephew, who seemed to be

getting into a state of agitation. They all three retired to one corner of the room.

"Could you not stay till morning—till nine o'clock, at the least?"

"It is impossible, sir; but whatever you do, look to the key which I gave you; and when your nephew introduces himself to Baron Vesemeyer, let him assume *another name*. God prosper you. The dancers are waiting; and my errand is fulfilled." He looked at his watch, and retired precipitately.

The company were impatient for a renewal of the dance: and Reginald and Caroline led off with a waltz—the eyes of all following them round and round. The lady was admitted to be the best waltzer in the room; and Reginald was notorious for his grace, and what is called expression, in this "circular movement:" not pressing his lips together, and staring in his partner's face as fierce as if he meant to eat her up when they sat down; nor did he, on the other hand, gaze abroad, or wildly around, as if the eyes of all Europe were fixed upon his evolutions. It was quiet, gentle, graceful motion; and now and then it was thought that both lady and gentleman interchanged more than *one* word. The lady did not languish in an angle of forty-five, with half-closed eyes; but allowed her countenance to sympathise with her lover's—till, to-

wards the conclusion, and, as the admitted privilege of a betrothed, she united her hands, after gently resting her left arm upon the shoulder of Reginald ; who, if the waltz had not ceased, must have quickly lost his equilibrium. Every body was now in motion ; and, on its conclusion, the Major insisted upon a country dance, leading off with Mrs. Danvers. Almost every one obeyed the injunction ; a slight cord being placed across the room towards the extremity, where the upper servants and principal villagers were admitted to the dance ; and who, it need hardly be said, exerted themselves to the utmost. There was a manifest rivalry between Mrs. Thimbleton and Mrs. Partridge; but the “ golden pippin ” carried off the prize.

Again the quadrilles resumed their sway—interchanged with waltzes ; and in no department was there a lack of spirits or activity. But time gets on. The clock has struck the hour of *five* ; the carriages having been ordered at four. The last emphatic sweep of the strings announces the merriment to cease. It had been gallantly sustained for eight hours. Reginald escorted his Caroline to the door of her father's carriage, and lifted the back of her left hand to his lips as he breathed an adieu,—“ We only part to meet again !—” On shutting, or rather slamming the door, the impatient horses plunged forwards for home ; and

Caroline, putting both hands over her crimsoned cheeks, fell back within the carriage—declaring the night to be “*very warm*—” meaning to say “*cold*.” Never had LOVE's STRATAGEM more completely succeeded.

CHAPTER XVII.

A COMING STORM.—THE LOVERS.

WHATEVER be the severity of the weather, there are two things which are sure to keep the inward man *warm*—Roguery and Love. While all hearts were bounding with delight at Dacre Hall—while health and innocence, and harmless gaiety of spirits, were causing the young and the middle-aged (for old age is now quite out of the question) to move with the velocity of antelopes—while neither care nor thought of the morrow indented their brow, or retarded their steps—it was a night of hot and feverish restlessness with Mr. Silvertop. His very, and only, confidential friend might betray him. There is something in the suspicion of a *betrayal* more harrowing even than a consciousness of having *done wrong*. When matters arise, and revolve within the individual, alone, he can give what colouring he pleases to their varied forms; and the aspect of a fiend may assume the loveliness of that of a seraph. He, who carries the key of his

villainy in his own pocket, may apply it, or not, as he pleases, to all those intricate wards of which conscience is sometimes composed ; but, when another is in possession of a *duplicate key*, there is a shuddering fearfulness, lest, in a cold-blooded moment of hatred and revenge, it may be applied to the developement of the blackest villainy. Who can confide in an *accomplice* ?

Accordingly, at break of day, and when the dancers and revellers were just entering upon the "honey dew of slumber," Mr. Silvertop mounted his horse, and pricked his sides lustily in the direction of the turnpike—where, at his own instigation (as the reader will be pleased to remember) the robbery of the papers had been completed. He affected great earnestness, and was particularly curious to know whether the toll-keeper had any recollection of their persons? "To me," said he, in a wailing voice of piteous woe, "the loss is irreparable."

"That may, or may not be," said the gate-keeper, "but if I were to see the man again, I could swear to him ; he, I mean, who went into the room, while I was engaged without. He had on a *blue smock-frock*, tied to his throat, and wore a white hat. He seemed to be a little lame in the left foot, and might measure full five feet eleven inches in height."

"Have you seen Mr. Clutterbuck upon the subject?" continued the coroner.

"To be sure I have," said the gate-keeper; "and to-morrow the matter is to be gone into, before the bench of justices."

"Quite proper—quite proper," replied Silvertop abruptly, and wished the man a good day.

He now galloped back to the village, entered his house, bespoke his breakfast, enquired for his clerk, and, somewhat indiscreetly, asked his manservant, on entrance, if Jobson and Stubbings had been seen that way of late?

The man replied, "no; but he understood they had been drinking and getting drunk for the last week at the Hole-in-the-Wall. Stubbings had put his smock-frock into pawn."

"Where?" said the excited master.

"I can't tell where," said the complacent man; "but little Quick is the fellow to know all things."

Without saying a word in reply, Mr. Silvertop rushed towards the hatter; leaving urn, tea-pot, roll, butter, and egg, untouched. As he was out of sight, his clerk entered. There was the breakfast—cooling. Five, ten, fifteen minutes elapsed; but no appearance of the master. At length, hunger pressing hard, the clerk thought it a pity that there should be such a waste of good materials—and he poured out the tea, assaulted the roll, butter,

and egg—seeming to enjoy everything with an exquisite relish—when Phœbe Crane was announced.

He could have well spared such a visitor. “ You come early, Phœbe; you might have waited till my master was up.”

“ Oh ! sir, he is up, and abroad. I saw him just now enter the shop of Mrs. ——.”

“ But are you sure ?”

“ Most sure, sir.”

“ That is very strange.”

A terrible dialogue ensued. Phœbe heaped upon the head of the clerk every expression of contempt and detestation with which a quickened and an injured spirit could supply her. “ You—you,” said she, shaking her fist, and fixing a pair of black eyes, which flashed like lightning, upon the shrinking clerk—“ *you* have brought me to this dreadful state. I had not known your infamous master but through *your* artifices.”

At this moment the master entered—staring as much at the occupation of his clerk as at the appearance of Phœbe Crane. He coiled himself up to dart upon his victim ; but he shrunk beneath the flagellation which she inflicted upon him. “ No, sir, because I am poor, you seek to crush me. Did you succeed with Mr. Ruffham, in procuring *that* which was to kill your *own progeny*? You thought of fastening it upon young Mr. Ponton, as

I have just learned. That gentleman can defend himself—and I have a brother who is determined to avenge me, ere he takes leave of me perhaps for ever ! Base coward and murderer, as you are, I leave you to your own miserable reflections."

Silvertop was struck speechless, as Phœbe Crane left the room on uttering the foregoing words. His eyes rolled this way and that. Both hands were locked together, till, loosening them, he struck his forehead hard with his right hand, and sunk upon a chair. His clerk, who had witnessed everything, "like one possessed" flew to his relief. A cup of tea, a bit of roll, egg, nothing would do. His brow was furrowed by a thousand wrinkles. He unbuttoned his waistcoat. "It was very hot. Why had the clerk made so large a fire?" The fire was in fact well nigh extinguished.

"Come, come, sir, you must rouse yourself. I waited for your coming in so long, that, in sheer compassion to the tea, I poured it out for myself. It is a bitter morning."

"*Bitter* indeed to this burning breast," said Silvertop to himself.

The man-servant entered.

"Here is a person, sir, with a blue smock-frock, which is brought for you to purchase. It's a mistake, surely?"

"Leave it, leave it," quietly replied the Coroner,

"it is wanted in an approaching trial. Give the man ten shillings for it. Be gone."

The servant obeyed, but seemed quite beside himself.

"I am better, much better, Fornham," said Mr. Silvertop to his clerk; "perhaps you will leave me?"

"Only let me remind you of ——"

"Remind me of nothing," said his master fretfully; "I want to be alone."

The clerk disappeared.

Mr. Silvertop now looked about him. For the first time, his presence of mind seemed utterly to forsake him. He walked up quietly to the smock-frock, and as quietly put it into the fire. While it was blazing, he rang the bell for a fresh breakfast supply. On entering, his servant started back.

"Good God, sir, you are burning the frock which is so much wanted at the approaching trial!"

"No matter," said his master, with a wild look and artificial smile, "it is very cold. It blazes famously, does it not, Charles?"

"A few logs of wood would have made as good a blaze, at the fifteenth part of the cost," replied the servant.

What had added to the excitement of Silvertop, before he entered, was the meeting with Scimes, who had told him of the note given to him by the

post-boy, and left by him with Mr. Cranmer. Yet did the Coroner seem comparatively composed when he knew of its destination, as he felt perfectly persuaded he could extricate it from being a perilous testimony against himself. With what alacrity does the human mind seize even upon the *shadow* of hope !

Mr. Silvertop had now entered his office, to arrange plans with his clerk : but he had stepped out. Wherefore ? Everything which, on another occasion, would have been scarcely noticed by him, was now seized upon with a fearful apprehension. At this juncture, a visit from Mr. Clutterbuck was announced. The Coroner trembled as the name fell from the servant's lips. Mr. Clutterbuck entered, and was somewhat confusedly requested to take a seat ; the owner of the mansion secretly wishing the visitor at the bottom of the Red Sea.

" This is a most strange affair," gravely observed the Magistrate, " but there will be no possibility of bringing it before a bench 'till *next month*. The evidence is very conflicting, though short ; but I doubt not that Jobson and Stubbings are either at the bottom or at the top of it. They are men of utterly worthless characters, and should have been hung long ago."

" Indeed, sir," replied Silvertop, his face lighting up with a sort of amazement.

" Why should this affect you so, Mr. Silvertop ?"

" Me — me, sir ? not otherwise than that I shall have more leisure to prepare the materials for the prosecution."

" Much will depend upon the discovery of a blue *smock-frock*. Have you been burning linen ? The smell is very strong."

" I have been destroying a great quantity of odds and ends of old red tape, old bundles of canvas, which had almost rotted in my strong cupboard, from the dampness of the wall—that's all."

" We expected to have seen you at the Major's last night—how was it you did not come ?"

Here was *another* stab. In fact, ever since he had quitted his bed, Mr. Silvertop had received as many arrows as were ever stuck into the sides of St. Sebastian—but an artful man is rarely taken on the hip from a common-place question.

" I had many papers to look over, and was preparing, as I was led to expect, for an inquest seven miles off."

" You paid Mrs. Danvers a visit last night—and a little delayed her appearance at Dacre Hall. An odd time of the night for visiting widows," said the Magistrate, jocosely.

But the remark brought the blood into the Coroner's cheeks, who observed that " He hoped he might pay visits at what hour he pleased, without being called to an account for it ?"

This was stab the *sixth*.

There was more misery in reserve for him. His clerk still continued out, and had got the key of the drawer in which the papers were deposited. Mr. Silvertop was all anxiety to reperuse them, when Jobson and Stubbings came to enquire after Mr. Fornham. They were introduced to Mr. Silvertop ; with whom they had, in fact, the slightest possible acquaintance. “ What was the object of their visit ? ” Stubbings said he wanted the blue smock-frock again ; but the lawyer told him he knew nothing about it, and advised him to call in the evening, when they would be sure to see the clerk. The housebreakers retreated muttering. This was the *seventh* stab to the wretched Mr. Silvertop. Did ever a morning lower with a heavier aspect ? Or was there ever an horizon which, from its inky blackness, threatened a more furiously COMING STORM ?

We now come to the notice of *stabs* of a very different description. It will be remembered that our hero had closed the door of the carriage, which, in his estimation, contained the most precious of all earthly substances. Reginald Cranmer had taken an impassioned leave of Caroline Ponton as he consigned her to the care of those parents, who not only loved her with the warmest affection, but

upon whom the events of the past night had wrought a very delightful as well as decided effect. In fact, both Thornborough Abbey and Dacre Hall contained a few sleepless inmates on that same night ; for just before his departure, the Squire drew the Major aside, and told him, that “ He thought his *Caroline* had made so sensible an impression upon *Reginald*, that they might both indulge the most reasonable hopes of an eventual union.”

The Major rubbed his hands, and smartly replied, that “ He thought he had seen the first shot fired, and it was so brisk and warm that the citadel could scarcely fail to surrender !”

Thus then it was, that, on retiring to rest, Mr. and Mrs. Ponton did nothing but talk of Reginald’s marked fondness for their daughter ; that daughter herself thinking only of the end of the feather of Reginald’s hat brushing her cheeks, and the unqualified declaration of love by which this little incident was succeeded. The serious tone given to the avowal of his passion ;—the deliberate gravity of their future plans ;—the earnestness and exclusiveness of their intercourse, in the midst of so much noise and so much gaiety—had altogether a very extraordinary effect upon her ; insomuch, that on trying every position of the human frame, she found sleep a stranger to her pillow.

Upon our hero himself the effect was as might have been naturally expected: and yet the feeling of self-reproach was almost as violent as that of passionate admiration. What was there in Caroline Ponton last night, which she had not possessed *before?* The dress! — absurd: although that might have clenched or consummated the whole. Upon what trifling springs the mightiest actions sometimes move! Thus he reasoned with himself; and there stood the now adored object of his choice before him, “making black night beauteous.”*

It was mid-winter; but Reginald could scarcely endure the bed’s covering. Not a particle of fire or candle-light was discernible, but from Caroline Ponton’s presence there seemed to stream almost the splendour of noon-day. It was the very extravagance of visionary happiness. Reginald Cranmer cared not to sleep; and he was stirring among the earliest of the household. Marvellous was the

* These words are from an old and scarcely known sonnet, in which they thus occur:

—“ My thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to THEE,
And keep my drooping eye-lids open wide—
Looking on darkness, which the blind do see.
Save that my soul’s imaginary sight
Presents THY IMAGE to my eager view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes that night beauteous, and her old face new.”

effect upon him, when, on entering the study of his uncle, he found the Major there, occupying his favourite arm-chair. On the entrance of the nephew, the uncle started up, “ Why, Reginald, will not *Caroline Ponton* let you sleep ?”

“ And does *Mrs. Danvers* cause you to be thus early at your studies, my dear uncle ?”

“ In truth not exactly so—but I was very anxious to commit to paper what passed between *the stranger* and ourselves yesterday evening, and if you will give me leave, Reginald, I will repeat the heads of it for your express consideration. It is most material.”

They were then read deliberately by Major Dacre, and as deliberately listened to by his nephew. “ You are sure that you possess the key ?” said the latter.

“ Here it is,” said the former, exhibiting it.

“ But the *note*, sir, left with you the other day ?”

“ Take it—and consult Silvertop about it,” said the Major, placing it in his hands again.

“ My dear uncle,” said Reginald, advancing with a somewhat measured step and serious air, “ what have been the effects of your **FANCY BALL** upon the mind of your nephew ! All my wishes—fond, foolish, and enraptured as they may have been—have become abundantly realized. **THE LADY ARABELLA** has walked out of the canvas, and wooed and won my very heart.”

“ Stabbed with a white wench’s black eye ! ” shouted forth the Major. ‘ *Æneadum genitrix ! hominom divomque voluptas !* ’ I love the full mouthed euphony of the old genitive plural. Stick to it always, my boy.”

“ Well, sir ; I might retort, perhaps, if I chose ; but what an angel is—”

“ *Imagination,* ” sharply replied the Major ; “ but no matter ; the conquest is effected—and you really love her so, that you could make her—”

“ My wife—this blessed day ! ” returned the impassioned lover.

“ Wisely and slow,” remarked the uncle—borrowing the monitory strain of Friar Lawrence, “ they stumble that go fast.”

And here the conference ended for the present. The nephew was anxious for a sortie and a breakfast at Thornborough Abbey, and the uncle had more reasons than one for wishing to pursue his occupations and meditations alone. In his way to the Abbey, Reginald met Charles Ponton—bound, as he naturally concluded, for the blue and silver boudoir at Hasleby Park.* The lovers mutually laughed, and prepared for their respective destinations ; but Reginald thought he might as well call upon Silvertop and discuss the subject of the note, left by Scrimes with the learned lawyer and coroner. Mr. Silvertop was at home, in deep medi-

* See page 123.

tation upon the papers, when Reginald presented himself ; and had that shrewd and intelligent young man allowed himself only five seconds abstraction from Lady Arabella and Caroline Ponton, he might have perceived, on placing the note before Silvertop, that the crimson blush of deep guilt had absolutely *fastened* itself upon the Coroner's countenance, who, on seeing the copy by the post-boy, shifted his seat, seized the paper, began to read it upside-down, and was lost in all manner of *gaucheries*, when his visitor quietly observed—"With the permission of Miss Caroline Ponton, I will read it to you, and, perhaps, leave it."

"Oh, do sir !—pray read it—and leave it, that I may make a proper copy of it."

But what had Miss Caroline Ponton to do with it?—thought the lawyer to himself. Accordingly it was very confusedly *read*, and left, by the visitor ; who, on parting, said, "Good morning to you, Lady Arabella,"—to the incomprehensible astonishment of the lawyer !

But there was *one* thing comprehensible enough. The note and the papers were all now in the possession of Mr. Silvertop. No stratagem, no art, no perseverance, nor cunning, nor fraud, nor force, could displace them.

"They are now MINE," said the confident Coro-

ner, as, on the departure of Reginald Cranmer, and locking them up in his iron-safe, he turned the key and awaited the presence of his clerk.

The interview had been a sad one for Reginald, who was quite unconscious of the repeated extravagances of his language and conduct; and who at the moment cared as little about the note as he did for the Koran; but, bounding along, he had Hasleby Park in view, when Stublings and Jobson, passing by, took off their hats.

“ May we speak a word, sir, with you ? ”

“ Not now—not at this moment; Lady Arabella is waiting for me.”

The men stared at each other, and Cranmer only observed, that on such a cold morning it were as well to put on a *coat*.

“ My *frock* is pawned, sir,” said the former.

“ Take this, and get it out of pawn—with my compliments to the ladies,” rejoined Cranmer, putting a half-sovereign into Stubbing’s hand.

It were difficult to describe the astonishment of the men, who, however, hastened to the pawn-broker’s.

On reaching the Squire’s mansion, Reginald pulled the bell rudely, and opened the door immediately with both hands. Not a creature had left the bed-rooms except Charles, who, as we have seen, was as alert for the presence of his “ ladye-

love," as Reginald appeared to be for that of his own. He walked into the study, into the dining-room, into the drawing-room, into the breakfast-room, but found not a soul in either. The fires were all lighted. It was past eleven o'clock. The post had come in. There were the newspapers, and he would read them till the family came down. His ears, however, were quickly erect when he heard the tread of a foot over-head. It was a hurried step, and seemed to be moving within a short compass. Why might it not be that of Caroline Ponton? Reginald pulled the bell. A neatly-attired female made her appearance.

"Any chance of the family's coming down this morning?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" replied the adroit Abigail; "Miss Ponton is moving over-head, for I went and told her I was sure that it was *you* coming across the lawn."

"Thank you—thank you, very much; there—"

And, as giddy and confused as a duck, Reginald Cranmer sat himself down to the newspaper again; to *look* only, for not one word did he attempt to *read*. The noise of the step continued overhead, shorter and quicker. Now it makes for the door. The door is opened, and a fast descending step is heard hurrying towards the breakfast-room—the door of which opens, and Reginald and the Lady Arabella exchange the *second* kiss of love.

“ My only happiness ! ! ”

“ And mine ! ”

And then they sat down, got up, leant upon the marble mantle-piece, approached each other, and there was a *third* and a *fourth* oscular salutation ; when the Squire, preceded by his “ view halloo,” came “ flying all abroad ” into the room, followed by Jemima and Nicholas Tyndale.

“ What had brought Mr. Cranmer so early to Hasleby Park ? ” said the cruel and thoughtless Tyndale ; adding,

“ Love conquers all, and we must yield to love.”

It seemed, therefore, not a very improbable inference, that the quoter of Virgil had himself experienced the truth of the aphorism quoted. The party were all in the best spirits, when Charles Ponton returned from the genial influence of the light blue and silver-starred boudoir of Marianne Cranmer ; and with him appeared Mr. Markham and Mr. Clutterbuck. It was only a morning call, after a night’s entertainment, which had seemed to have made the morrow as a day of perfect lassitude or disjointedness. As the day waxed onward, almost the whole of the Dacre Hall party were on their legs, visiting their neighbours ; but a very urgent message to Mrs. Cranmer, from her brother, had brought that lady, with Mr. Ruffham, to Dacre Hall, to visit Maria Cranmer—taken sud-

denly ill, and most anxious to have medical advice. The efforts of the preceding evening had been too much for her. She had not slept, and her rapid pulse and flushed cheek bespoke a very altered and serious turn in her system. Her mind had wandered somewhat ; but there were yet hopes of an amendment, although Mr. Ruffham assumed a more serious air than was usual with him on such occasions. “ I think,” he said, affecting an indifference of expression, “ there would be no harm if we sent for Dr. Atkinson ? ”

“ By all means, and immediately,” replied the anxious mother.

Here Reginald made his appearance, and, on seeing him, his sister begged he would come and sit by her side. They all left the room, with the exception of Reginald, having dispatched a messenger on horseback for the physician. “ Is it *you*, Reginald ? ” faintly enquired the invalid. “ I am so happy it is you ; but I cannot talk much.”

Reginald stooped down, and quietly kissed his sister’s cheek, and telling her to be quite tranquil, for that *nothing* should take him from her.

“ What ! ” replied she, “ not *Caroline Ponton* ? ” And here that amiable creature made her appearance—only to say, that she would relieve guard with Reginald, should he be compelled to sit up all night. Perhaps they had preferred to keep guard *together* ?

Dr. Atkinson had now arrived ; and only the physician, with Mr. Ruffham and the mother, were allowed to visit the invalid, although poor Reginald, with tears in his eyes, begged to know the worst, should anything very serious have taken place. It was a moment of deep and awful interest. While the medical men, after feeling the pulse, looked in each other's faces, Dr. Atkinson requested the sufferer to breathe as long and as hard as she could. He then took Mr. Ruffham by the arm, and they walked to the other end of the room.

“ My dearest mother, is that you ? ” said the patient, turning her eyes in the direction where Mrs. Cranmer stood.

“ Yes, my child,” said the heart-breaking mother, falling on her knees by the bed-side.

“ Mrs. Cranmer,” observed Dr. Atkinson, “ it is a maxim with me *never to despair*—at least, on the first visit. I am going a few miles beyond, and will look in upon you on my return, about ten o’clock to-night. You will consider the two visits but as one. Keep up a good heart.” So saying, both the medical men quitted the apartment, and Reginald returned to his watch, imploring his mother to go below to the Major.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DROOPING FLOWER. THE GRAVE OF THE
GOOD.

IT was nearer eleven than ten o'clock when Dr. Atkinson returned. Mr. Ruffham was in attendance, and both the medical men were immediately introduced into the bedchamber of the sufferer. Reginald arose, and retreated as they entered. It was too evident that the disorder was making an onward movement. The hurried pulse, furred tongue, parched skin, and wandering eyes, proclaimed a change for the worse. Mrs. Cranmer entered. "Well, gentlemen, how do you find my dear girl?" Mr. Ruffham turned his head aside—his eyes moistened with tears. Dr. Atkinson quietly, but firmly observed, that the symptoms were doubtless alarming; the fever had greatly increased, and the patient was in imminent danger. "But, madam," rejoined he, "let us not despair. I will be with you by nine to-morrow morning, and in the mean time you have, in Mr. Ruffham,

both a kind friend and an experienced practitioner.” Dr. Atkinson then took his leave, and Mr. Ruffham accompanied him to the hall-door.

What a contrast from the preceding evening did Dacre Hall now exhibit! What changes within twenty-four hours! The house of gladness is become the house of mourning. All its inmates in tears—for Maria was as tenderly as generally beloved. The excessive excitement of the preceding night induced Mrs. Cranmer to urge upon her brother and her son the absolute necessity of immediate repose. Women are giants in grief:—they never tire. Like St. Paul’s account of charity, or christian love, they “ bear, believe, hope, and endure all things.” The uncle and nephew suffered themselves to be forced into their respective bed-rooms; and the mother, attired in a loose gown for the night, sat between the fire and the bed of the invalid, as the night-lamp burnt dimly upon the mantle-piece, and as the whole house was buried in sleep—with the exception of her own servant in an adjoining room, who, every now and then, walked softly into the bedchamber, to know if she were wanted. Maria lay totally insensible; but restless and feverish—turning from side to side—and mechanically taking off and putting on her night-cap. She muttered sounds which were quite unintelligible; except that once she was heard to

say, “ I am coming to you very shortly, my dear Sidney.”

Although there may be few situations more trying—more agonizingly painful—than that of a parent watching the expiring embers of mortality in a beloved and sinking child, still there were circumstances in the case under consideration which mitigated the severity of the trial. The afflicted creature could find “ no rest for the sole of her foot” in this present world. She partook of all its enjoyments mechanically. Her heart was in the grave of her lover. The sun rose and the sun set; but to *her* eye, from morning till eve, the heavens were overcast, and there was neither fragrance in the meadow, nor freshness in the breeze. Maria Cranmer had been evidently wasting in figure, and drooping in spirit for the last twelve months. As her passion for the departed Sidney had been deeply seated, so her affliction on the loss of him knew no bounds. Had he survived the action in which he fell, he had been made post-captain ;—but “ the will of Heaven had ordered it otherwise.” The skill with which he bore down upon the enemy was perfect. He laid his vessel by the side of the adverse ship so skilfully, that almost every shot took effect. He had scarcely attained his thirtieth year when he fell. He possessed a fine romantic spirit—declaring that nothing

short of the fame of Nelson would satisfy him. By some curious circumstance he became in possession of a very extraordinary account, or rather plan, of the action and defeat of the Spanish Armada, which, after the most unremitting inquiries, I fear has perished with his papers.

Mrs. Cranmer was a woman in whom good sense and calm feeling, as she advanced in years, took very strong hold. Her sense of religion was also steady and strong. She had occasion to exercise every faculty of her mind on the present trying occasion; but, from the beginning, she had prepared herself for the worst. It was a sad and sorrowful thing to see a sweet young woman at times under the influence of a “malignant star,” from aberration of intellect — and at times reverting to sensibility only to bemoan the wretchedness of her lot—the desire to be at peace and at rest, with one, in whom all this world’s blessings and enjoyments were alone concentrated. There could be no doubt that the excitement of the preceding evening had brought on this crisis in her daughter: and although the mother had not been essentially instrumental to the part she took, yet, by persuasion and remonstrance, she might have *averted* such a result. It was just possible; and such a thought brought the tears into her eyes. The clock had struck three, when, the door gently opening, Reginald Cranmer

stole into the apartment. At that particular moment a gleam of recollection came across the sufferer's mind, and Maria Cranmer, in agitated but faint accents, asked, "If that were *Reginald*?" The brother flew to the sister—pressed her hand—and kissed her parched lips. "You are come in time, dearest *Reginald*; for my lamp is burning yet more dimly than that upon the mantle-piece.—And my *Mother* too! Oh, how welcome! What is the hour?"

"My dearest Maria," replied the mother, "compose yourself. Never mind the hour. You have had some sleep. Are you refreshed?"

The poor creature here smoothed her hair, and arranged her attire somewhat—adding, "you must take me as you find me—but why are you both here?"

They quickly composed her perturbed spirits, and had the gratification of seeing her sink into a sleep, but rendered very distracted by her feverish temperament. It was rather abstraction than sleep. Sighs and groans, and short screams, occasionally broke from her. Mrs. Cranmer continued to sit and watch, and Reginald again retired to his bedroom. Towards morning, the ravages of the night became apparent. There is a storm, unaccompanied by wind, which breaks down the fairest flower, and scatters far and wide the fondest hopes. It pene-

trates without a sound, and keeps inflexible possession, till the object, thus visited, bends beneath its silent and severe course. Daylight visits the earth and those that breathe upon it. Dr. Atkinson and Mr. Ruffham are punctual as heretofore. The curtains are drawn aside, and a deep patch of crimson is fastened upon the cheek of Maria. Her eyes wander. She moves her arms wildly about. It will be soon over. The family are called in—and dear Mr. Thomson, who had read to her so many sound lessons of fortitude and resignation during the first gush of her sorrows, kneels by the bedside, with the book of prayer. Julia, Marianne, and Reginald are on one side ; the mother, uncle, and curate, on the other : two faithful servants occupy the bottom of the bed. The dying Maria is quite insensible. They sob sadly and loudly around her ; then rise, and retreat softly—leaving only Reginald behind. He stands by her side ; motionless—with fixed eyes ; observes a slight quiver upon her lips—hears one deep, long-drawn sigh—and all is stiffened in the cold marble fixedness of DEATH. Maria is at rest with her Sidney.

“ In the blest kingdom meek of joy and love,
There entertain her all the saints above,
In solemn troops and sweet societies ;
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from her eyes.”

LYCIDAS.

A loud burst of sorrow from Reginald brought all the party back again. There she lay—the sweetest of all spring flowers!—deserted by her immortal spirit, which was now knocking at heaven's gate for entrance. A smile yet possessed the countenance; and the scarlet flush had not yet subsided.

"There is beauty even in death!" exclaimed the Major, with a deep but tremulous voice.

"God has her spirit!"

"Let us all hope so to follow her good example," observed the Curate, "that with *her* we may be partakers of Christ's heavenly kingdom."

The curtains were drawn softly around. The shutters closed; and the chamber of death left in darkness and solitude. And yet not wholly so. The spirit of the brother could brook no control. Reginald loved Maria—extravagantly—as his favourite sister; and he entreated to be left two minutes alone.

"Dear, departed spirit!" said he, lifting up her stiff, icy hand, and placing it to his lips, "evermore blessed be thy memory! Thrice blessed to thy bereaved brother be the remembrance of thy image and thy virtues! They shall never depart from me. Be thy dear spirit present with me!—in all my outgoings and incomings; to cheer, to encourage, and to protect! Never, from these lips, has one angry word escaped towards thee. I cherished

thee in my heart's core. Thou wert hung up, thou, as the tablet upon which every kind thought, and every generous wish, was inscribed. And oh, my sister ! how thou didst love thy unworthy brother ! Accept—accept these effusions from one"—

" Who is yet dearer to me than the *deceased!*!"—exclaimed CAROLINE PONTON—who had scarcely entered the house a minute—pressing her way onward to the chamber of death !

" Merciful Father—Caroline!"

" Oh ! my Reginald ; let me join my sorrows to thine. Objects, like that before us, teach us to break through all the ordinary forms of courtesy and discipline, and to feed the sorrows of the soul with sustenance which is not of this world. Let me kneel by your side. Grant me this happiness ; whether or not you will forgive this intrusion!"

Reginald pressed her to his heart ; and in a minute they both quitted the room. The former assumed a comparative cheerfulness, as conscious that, now, all that remained of the departed was but as "dust and ashes," to be consigned to an early grave. The first outbreak of deeply-seated sorrow is overwhelmingly powerful. You do not care to affix limits to it. Every throb of the heart is a relief to the mind—and so it was throughout Dacre Hall on the present occasion. From the highest to the lowest there was but one sensation,

The disease was so rapid ! It was as sudden darkness after the effulgence of mid-day sunshine. And she was so beloved ! Wild, and at times warbling like Ophelia—sad, and at times pensive as Viola. The very elements of her constitution, or complaint, naturally betrayed themselves in this manner. There was no middle position to be maintained. In high spirits, or in thoughtful abstraction, Maria Cranmer wore out the day, the month, and the year. She was always *looking forward*. If the dust of the earth had been as so many sparkling diamonds, she would have trod them beneath her feet, as utterly unworthy her regard. It was *mind* and *soul*—the mind and soul of her departed SIDNEY—that she alone sought to possess.

The news of her decease flew like lightning throughout the village ; and it is only sober truth to affirm, that the eyes of the villagers were suffused with tears on its reception. Although Maria had been little personally known to them, yet she and the Major had been often seen threading the bye-ways together ; and whoever Maria met was sure to be favoured with a smile, or a token of recognition ; but, with *some* of them, she maintained almost habits of intimacy. Mrs. Thimbleton was almost overwhelmed with deeply-felt sorrow. Mrs. Partridge *would* not sell one article in the way of trade, on the day of the arrival of the news. She

shut up her shop. One by one the villagers stole out of their tenements, and presented themselves in front of Dacre Hall, where all the windows shewed the closed shutters. Not a human face, or human figure, was seen upon the terrace or lawn. Then came the widows—Smithers and Spark—to look, and to return as they came—in a state of dejection. At this moment the first stroke of the passing bell was heard in a low, muffled tone. The whole village was now roused. They were not prepared for so sad an event; and a little crowd had congregated about the front gate, when Mr. Silvertop, affecting the greatest solemnity of manner, came briskly up, and begged they would disperse—it was so distressing to the family! Meanwhile the servants of the neighbouring gentry were all in motion; first, to ascertain the fact; and, secondly, to reveal it to their masters. At every stroke of the passing bell, excitement and curiosity were awakened; but almost the whole of the visitors, on the night of the fancy ball, were already in possession of the melancholy news.

We return to Dacre Hall; where, towards night, all the members of the family had congregated, including two or three who had not previously appeared. Arrangements were now made for the funeral, which, according to the express desire of the Major, was to be a *walking* one; and it was

further settled, at the entreaty of the followers, that the body should be accompanied to the grave by six virgin pall-bearers. It need hardly be specified who these bearers were; but to the two sisters were added the two Pontons, and two cousins from London. All the servants of both establishments were desirous to be numbered among the mourners. The brother and sister, Major Dacre, and Mrs. Cranmer, on the day ensuing the decease, settled every thing quietly and appropriately. A calm, and even a serene feeling seemed to possess them; for where was the wisdom of unavailing sorrow? The departed could not come back again. They might go to her, but she could never revisit them. Even the eyes of Reginald, on the second day, seemed to be “unsullied by a tear;” although, when he smiled, it was a palpably mechanical effort. Caroline Ponton had returned home. Wherefore? —but to feed her fancy and her affliction on the departure of Maria, and on the profound, immeasurable attachment of Reginald to her memory! “If he has thus felt for the *dead*, what must not his feelings be for the *living*? To possess the affections of *such* a man—to be conscious, too, of *deserving* to possess them—to have mingled tears, and sighs, and sorrows, with the avowed object of a deeply-rooted and indescribable passion—to have experienced this foretaste of future bliss on *such* an

occasion, and for such a creature as Maria Cranmer, were a happiness as exquisite as unlooked for ! Was ever love so cemented ? Was there ever, in its earlier progress, such a foundation for future happiness ? If *brotherly* love were thus marked and strong, what of necessity would *conjugal* affection be ? ”

There was truth, but not “ the whole truth,” in these reflections. The full tide of affection, now deeply flowing in the bosom of the soliloquist, would naturally lead even to extravagance of feeling. But the nicer and less perceptible barriers had been overleaped ; and there was no room, or no inclination, to doubt the certainty upon which Caroline Ponton’s mind built up all its calculations of approaching happiness. It never once occurred to her that *brotherly* affection was a thing apart ; deep, pure, and sacred—unruffled and untainted by any dross, even of the grosser ingredients of which the most exclusive attachment might be composed. Reginald, like Hamlet, might have leaped into his sister’s grave, and called loudly upon her to quit her coffin, and rise up, and mingle again with society, and again be the admiration and delight of all beholders !—and yet have possessed only a *qualified* confidence towards the woman of his free choice ! But let us render him his full meed of justice. We have before observed on the peculi-

arly constructed state of his mind.* There were no indications of “bumps or organs.” Quackery, in its Proteus shape, could find no entrance there. It must be owned that his attachment to Caroline had been kept back by what might be called a series of untoward events. It seemed as if there had been a willing spirit, but a backward temperament. Beauty, accomplishments, a fine understanding, and a brave and warm heart, were the characteristics of his Beloved. Every tongue was exerted in her praise—every eye followed her movements. The moment had at length arrived, when all the pent-up properties of his boiling bosom had overleaped their boundaries, and fate had, in an especial manner, marked her for HIS OWN. His offer had been rather *embraced* than accepted. A night of revelry had been a night of deep and passionate love. Caroline and Reginald were now irrevocably betrothed. Then followed the day of sadness “hard upon,” and Caroline Ponton was yet dearer and sweeter in sorrow than in joy.

Such were the properties of an attachment which is to form so material a feature in our future history; for the present, we revert to the chamber of death. It was settled that the funeral should take place on the seventh day of the decease. Mr. and Mrs. Markham had quitted the vicarage, and gone

* Page 41.

into cathedral residence; but as soon as they heard of the affliction at Dacre Hall, Mr. Markham intimated his desire of joining the train of mourners; and Mrs. Markham wished to know whether her attendance could in any way contribute to the relief of Mrs. Cranmer? That lady politely declined it, but with assurances of the warmest thankfulness. The day of the funeral at length arrived. Every shop and every window was closed, and the village seemed as if deserted, for the inhabitants had all gone up to the church. The pall-bearers were habited in white, assembled at Dacre Hall. The carriages of the neighbouring gentry were tendered, but civilly declined; there was no wish for any parade. The corpse was met at the church-door by Mr. Thomison, whose wife and children occupied the vicarial pew. The whole village was assembled, and the day proved one of unprecedented mildness. Reginald was the chief mourner. Behind him moved the Major and Mrs. Cranmer; then Mr. and Mrs. Ponton; Charles Ponton and Tyndale, who with difficulty could be supported; Mr. Clutterbuck and Mr. Ruffham; the establishments at Thornborough Abbey, Dacre Hall, and Hasleby Park, with an almost countless multitude in the rear. The church overflowed. Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe, with Mrs. Thimbleton, in the front of the singing-gallery; the two churchwardens in their

pew, with white silk round the staves, fastened near the door. And although sorrow and curiosity might be at times contending for the mastery in their minds, yet it was impossible to view such a scene without sadness of spirit ; and the eyes of William Stigwood, and Edward Hancock, were not exempt from the usual visitation of human infirmity. On depositing the body upon the trussle, the pall-bearers stood by the side of it ; six young women, with countenances which the late Harlow might have despaired of accurately copying. That of Julia betrayed a deep and thoughtful grief, unrelieved by a tear. Marianne was sobbing wildly, her countenance at times wholly hid by her hands or handkerchief. The eyes of Caroline Ponton were often turned to the pew where the chief mourner stood up, alone ; resting his cheek upon his hand, and his arm upon the edge of the pew ; his eyes wholly turned towards the chancel, where the body was to be presently inhumated.

The moment of lowering it had now arrived ; and when Mr. Thomson, in measured and expressive accents, said “ earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ! ”—and the loose dirt rattled upon the coffin-lid—Reginald struck his forehead with his right hand, and then, covering his face with both hands, turned towards his mother to support him ! Major

Dacre was the prompt assistant; for the poor mother gazed wildly about, as if unconscious of all passing events. The chancel was now perfectly choked by visitors; and the confusion which ensued, calling off the attention of the mourners, Mr. Thomson, himself perhaps overpowered beyond most in attendance, seemed to hasten to the end of the service in a subdued voice, so as to leave no time or opportunity for the indulgence of sorrowful sentiment. The re-action in these cases is sufficiently quick. Within five minutes—but there *was* a minute of deep and awful suspense, when, the mourners receding, Reginald approached the brink of the grave, and took his farewell view of the body of *HER* he loved the best upon earth! The lid was in part covered with the mould thrown upon it; but *there* stood Reginald Cranmer—with closed hands, opened mouth and eyes, holding discourse as if with the dead returned to earth! His lips were convulsed, but no sound escaped them. At that instant, he felt an arm within his own—it was Caroline Pon-ton's. He seemed not much to heed it; but there they both stood—thoroughly opposed in attire, thoroughly united in soul and sentiment. The crowd made another rush towards the grave, to behold these extraordinary personages—when Re-ginald, turning round, and looking down upon

Caroline, beheld her streaming eyes ; and kissing them, retreated abruptly with her to the family-pew. Mr. Markham now interfered, and requested the crowd to disperse. Within five minutes the mourners were in their carriages, sent up expressly to convey them to their respective homes.

It was the earnest request and entreaty of Major Dacre that *all* the family should be at church on the ensuing Sabbath. Where could they find more consolation than in the house of God ? And how artificial and contemptible were human forms and ceremonies which taught the mourner to shut himself up in his chamber, or in his mansion, for a mere *show* of grief. There was not only no dissentient voice, but no dissentient *wish* ; for, in fact, Maria Cranmer had been a long time “as dead though she lived.” Mr. Thomson alluded to recent events in his discourse, but in a tender and delicate manner. “There needed no express demonstration of sorrow for the departed, as though she had died ‘without hope and fear in Christ.’ Her whole life was one of gentleness and Christian love ; and she had been tried in her tenderest part. This world had long closed its brightest glories upon her mental vision ; yet her latter moments had been alarmingly quick, the natural result of her weak and shattered constitution. When the de-

stroyer, Death, came—he came to seize upon one, who, although she saw him disarmed of his *sting*, could nevertheless not be deprived of his *power*; and he claimed her upon gentle, although summary, terms. She was, indeed, nothing loth to obey the summons:—her body, therefore, now sleeps near us, unmolested, balmed in the dews of human sorrow; but her spirit has mounted upwards to God's holy and everlasting throne!—there it receives your best vows and wishes; and from thence it dispenses its favours upon the objects of its tenderest attachments."

There might have been something, perhaps, of a poetical turn or feeling in the latter part of the foregoing sentiment.; but there was comfort in the hearing of it; and both Mrs. Cranmer and Reginald seemed, in an especial manner, to be soothed with it. "The bitterness of death is past," said the former, on returning home; "and now, my children," added she, "since Maria is *really* taken from us, since her blessed spirit is departed, and at rest, let us, if possible, draw nearer and closer to each others' bosoms, and feel but one common chord in our earthly sympathies. O, Reginald ! make haste to come back to us when you shall have rescued your paternal treasures from the fangs of those who now grasp them." The family

then betook themselves to prayers, and sought their beds a full two hours before the ordinary time. To a bruised spirit, sweet as well as heavy falls the honey-dew of slumber.

END OF VOL. I.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



134 830

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY